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THE ENGLAND OF DICKENS



CHARLES DICKENS AND HIS FRIENDS ON THE LOGAN STONE

(The figure at top is John Forster, the other figures are
D. MacLise, Clarkson Stanfield, and Charles Dickens.)

Drawn by Clarkson Stanfield, R A

Frontispiece

THE ENGLAND OF DICKENS

BY

WALTER DEXTER

AUTHOR OF

“THE LONDON OF DICKENS,” “THE KENT OF DICKENS”

I am both a town traveller and a country traveller, and am always on the road. Figuratively speaking, I travel for the great house of Human Interest Brothers, and have rather a large collection in the fancy goods way.

The Uncommercial Traveller.



CECIL PALMER
FORTY-NINE
CHANDOS
STREET
W.C.

F I R S T
EDITION
1 9 2 5
C O P Y-
R I G H T

PREFACE

THE England of Dickens is a country of actuality as well as of romance ; and Dickens knew his England fairly thoroughly.

The impressionable part of his knowledge was gained in the days before the railway was heard in the land ; when the proverbial “Slow-coach” was still the only means of locomotion, hence it was not until his later books that the shriek of the locomotive engine resounded in his pages. Certain it is that he cast a halo around the coaching days ; no other Dickens came after to do the like by the horse of iron and steel.

Dickens’s knowledge of England was obtained in many ways ; by the exercise of his early profession of reporter, when he travelled into Suffolk and into Devonshire to report election speeches ; by his holiday jaunts with Hablot K. Browne (Phiz) in 1838, first into Yorkshire and then through the Midlands to Wales, Liverpool and Manchester ; by a trip to the West in 1842 with his friend and biographer, John Forster, and his artist friends, Daniel Maclise and Clarkson Stanfield, just after his return from seeing all the glories that the New World had to show him ; by his own family holidays at Broadstairs, where he was a constant visitor over a period of years, at Dover, at Folkestone, and at the Isle of Wight ; by his “Splendid Strolling” play-acting with Mark Lemon, Douglas Jerrold and others in aid of Shakespeare’s House, Leigh Hunt, and the Guild of Literature and Art, when the larger cities such as Manchester, Liverpool, Sheffield and Birmingham were visited ; by his Readings, first in aid of the local Working Men’s Institutions—the forerunners of our Public Libraries—at Folkestone, Chatham, Coventry, and elsewhere ; and by the three great Reading Tours, for his own benefit, when all the principal towns were visited, from Carlisle and Berwick in the North, to Plymouth and Dover in the South.

The letters he wrote to his family and friends during these excursions are as full of quaint observations of life and character as are his novels, and it has been our object in this book to place them in a permanent position in the towns to which they refer, thus enabling the reader to see at a glance how Dickens's visits to various places were reflected—often almost immediately—in his writings.

A certain amount of repetition of fact and quotation has been rendered unavoidable by the desire of the author to make each section devoted to a place, as complete as possible.

If the reader in glancing at the table of contents should wonder at the absence of a chapter on London, or should consider that scant courtesy has been afforded to the Dickens county of Kent, we would remind him that the present volume is already of somewhat ample proportions, and that the subjects of *The London of Dickens* and *The Kent of Dickens* have already been dealt with by the present writer in separate volumes bearing these titles.

We offer no apology for this, the third and final volume of the English Topography of Dickens. The growing desire for knowledge of all things relating to his life and work is its all-sufficient justification.

It seems but an inadequate means of thanking my old and valued friend, Mr. B. W. Matz, to put on record here how much this book owes to the immense amount of useful knowledge he has collected during his twenty years editorship of *The Dickensian*; but I do so most gratefully. To Kitton's *The Dickens Country*, acknowledgments are also recorded, and likewise to the Librarians of the towns visited by Dickens for their verification of the dates, and other interesting details, which, in many cases, would have been unobtainable but for their kind assistance, and finally to Messrs. Macmillan & Co., Ltd., for permission to quote freely from *The Letters of Charles Dickens*.

WALTER DEXTER.

*Highbury,
7th February, 1925.*

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THE ENGLAND OF DICKENS

CHAPTER ONE

ALONG THE OLD RED ROYAL DOVER ROAD

I

“THE Old Red Royal Dover Road” was Dickens’s description in a letter to a friend concerning the red jacketed postilions he turned out on it when Longfellow paid him a visit at Gad’s Hill in 1868 and it is only fitting that this our first pilgrimage through the England of Dickens should be over the road with which he was so familiar and that had such a fascination for him.

Even when a small boy at Chatham, he used to delight in being taken by his father for a walk to the top of Gad’s Hill to see the house there which in the hey-day of his fame he purchased, and where he died in 1870, and in his first great story he made Mr. Pickwick and his friends journey by coach along the first half of the Dover Road to see Rochester; and following that came little David Copperfield on his long and weary tramp to his aunt’s at Dover.

Mr. Dorrit also made the journey, but in quite the “grand manner,” his magnificent equipage being “waylaid at Dartford, pillaged at Gravesend, rifled at Rochester, fleeced at Sittingbourne, and sacked at Canterbury.” Then, too, in the later books, *Great Expectations* and *Edwin Drood*, the scene is often set about the Dover Road, and Dickens himself often tramped it, so altogether we have a “glorious host” to bear us company along the seventy odd miles.

It is from northward beyond the General Post Office, that we should properly commence this Pickwickian-Copperfield Pilgrimage, for here, in that portion of what is now the Goswell Road that lies between Aldersgate and a little beyond Old Street, was the original Goswell Street. Here Mrs.

The England of Dickens

Bardell let her second floor front to Mr. Pickwick, who on the morning of the 13th May, 1827, "threw open his chamber window and looked out upon the world beneath." Having surveyed Goswell Street to the right, to the left, and over the way, and being sure that he was not content "to gaze on Goswell Street for ever, without one effort to penetrate to the hidden countries which on every side surround it." Mr. Pickwick descended, "his portmanteau in his hand, his telescope in his greatcoat pocket, and his note-book in his waistcoat" and walked to "the coach stand in St. Martin's le Grand." From here it was "Only a bob's worth" to the Golden Cross at Charing Cross, then situated where the Nelson Monument now stands; here he met his three fellow Pickwickians, and joined by Mr. Alfred Jingle, they started by the Commodore Coach to Rochester. And so begun the topography of Dickens; and Rochester became the centre of what is now known as the Kentish Dickensland.

By way of Whitehall and Westminster Bridge went the Commodore Coach, but the Dover Road proper is reached via London Bridge and the Borough, both of which have many unforgettable memories with Dickens's life and works: for the immortal Sam Weller made his first bow to a vast appreciative public in the yard of the White Hart Inn in the Borough; and a little lower down stood the Marshalsea, famous as the birthplace of Little Dorrit; near by still stands St. George's Church, where she was married to Arthur Clennam. Over the way is Lant Street, where Dickens lodged as a boy while his father was in the Marshalsea: and here, too, he made Bob Sawyer's lodge with Mrs. Raddle, and give his famous party.

There is no account of the Dover Road given in *Pickwick*. The party were too engrossed with Mr. Jingle's stories to give much attention to the road they were traversing: so we have to turn to *David Copperfield*, *A Tale of Two Cities*, and several of *The Uncommercial Traveller* papers to make up for the deficiency.

The roads from London Bridge and Westminster Bridge both join at the St. George's Circus, where once stood the obelisk, now removed to outside Bethlehem Hospital near by. This was the scene of David Copperfield's bad start, for at the Obelisk, Blackfriars' Road, he was robbed of his box and his half-guinea:

I ran after him as fast as I could. . . . I narrowly escaped being run over, twenty times at least, in half a mile.

The Old Royal Dover Road 3

. . . At length, confused by fright and heat, and doubting whether half London might not by this time be turning out for my apprehension, I left the young man to go where he would with my box and money; and, panting and crying but never stopping, faced about for Greenwich, which I had understood was on the Dover Road. . . .

That night he slept at Blackheath beneath a haystack, within sight of his old school, Salem House, and the next day tramped the road to Rochester.

Elsewhere the writer has given a full account of the Dickens interest in the Borough, Blackheath, Greenwich, and the whole course of the Dover Road,* and we have now only space to recall its chief associations.

On Shooter's Hill we conjure up the picture of the Dover mail "lumbering up" and of Mr. Jarvis Lorry on a journey between the "two cities" and we see Pip, come into his expectations, riding to town listening to the conversation of the two convicts; and so we go :

Over the road where the old Romans used to march, over the road where the old Canterbury pilgrims used to go, over the road where the travelling trains of the old imperious priests and princes used to jingle on horseback between the Continent and this Island through the mud and water, over the road where Shakespeare hummed to himself, "Blow, blow, thou winter wind," as he sat in the saddle at the gate of the inn-yard noticing the carriers; all among the cherry orchards, apple orchards, cornfields and hop-gardens; . . . by Canterbury to Dover.

Dickens's earlier recollections of a coach journey on the Dover Road appear in the paper entitled "Dullborough Town," in which he recalls leaving Chatham for London at the age of eleven.

As I left Dullborough in the days when there were no railroads in the land, I left it in a stage coach . . . melodiously called Timpson's Blue-eyed Maid . . . Timpson's was a moderate sized coach office (in fact, a little coach office) with an oval transparency in the window, which looked beautiful by night, representing one of Timpson's coaches in the act of passing a milestone on the London road with great velocity.

* *The London of Dickens and The Kent of Dickens.* Published by Cecil Palmer, London.

In the concluding part of *The Seven Poor Travellers* we get another personal touch, and a true one, for Dickens often tramped the Dover Road between Rochester and London.

As for me, I was going to walk by Cobham Woods, as far upon my way to London as I fancied. . . . Blackheath, begirt me, far and near, until I had come to old trees in Greenwich Park and was being steam-rattled through the mists now closing in once more, towards the lights of London.

II

Gravesend used to be a popular holiday resort in Dickens's day. In *Bleak House* we are told how, in the long vacation, "all the young clerks are madly in love, and . . . pine for bliss with the beloved object, at Margate, Ramsgate or Gravesend," and in "The Tuggses at Ramsgate" Mr. Joseph Tuggs suggested Gravesend as the place for the family holiday, but "the idea was unanimously scouted. Gravesend was low."

The next village on the road is Chalk, about a mile from Gravesend. It was here that Dickens spent his honeymoon in 1836. The house where the newly-married couple stayed is now marked with a couple of memorial tablets.

It is interesting to note that both Walter Gay in *Dombey and Son* and Tommy Traddles in *David Copperfield*, spent their honeymoons in Kent.

Almost midway between Gravesend and Rochester, standing a little way back on the right, is the house that is familiarly and affectionately known to the innumerable band of Dickens devotees the world over as Gad's Hill, its full and correct name being Gad's Hill Place. This was Dickens's home from 1857 until his death in 1870.

But years before it became his home—indeed from his very earliest years when a small boy at Chatham—he conceived a great attachment to the house. He used to like to be taken out to see it by his father, and it was a cherished ambition of his life to be in a position to buy the house and live there.

He has confirmed this in his paper, "Travelling Abroad," in *The Uncommercial Traveller*, in which as he is journeying along the road to Dover there crosses it a vision of himself:

So smooth was the old high road, and so fresh were the horses, and so fast went I, that it was midway between

Gad's Hill. The robbery was committed before the door, on the man with the treasure, and Falstaff ran away from the identical spot of ground now covered by the room in which I write. A little rustic alehouse, called the Sir John Falstaff, is over the way—has been over the way, ever since, in honour of the event. Cobham Woods and Park are behind the house; the distant Thames in front; the Medway, with Rochester, and its old castle and cathedral on one side. The whole stupendous property is on the old Dover Road, so when you come, come by the North Kent Railway (not the South Eastern) to Strood or Higham, and I'll drive over to fetch you.

The grounds, which still contain the tiny gravestone of Dickens's pet birds, including the "wilderness" on the opposite side of the main road, and reached by a tunnel: and part of the interior of the house—the library and the dining-room, are usually shown to visitors on Wednesday afternoons.

III

There is no town in Great Britain—perhaps not in all the world—that has so fascinated a writer throughout his whole life as Rochester fascinated Dickens. Although not his actual birthplace it was, as Forster says, "the birthplace of his fancy"; and his thoughts always turned to it in his writings.

Dickens was only four years of age when the family came from Portsmouth to live in the adjacent town of Chatham—and here the family resided for seven years, and Dickens has left more than one record of the mental pictures he made during that time of the city and its people.

In the preface to the cheap edition of *Nicholas Nickleby* in 1848 we find him speaking of being "a not very robust child, sitting in bye-places, near Rochester Castle, with a head full of Partridge, Strap, Tom Pipes and Sancho Panza" and when the time came for the father to fill a post in London, deep was his grief at parting with the city he had learnt to love so well.

Forster has left us an impression of this based on an actual conversation with Dickens:

"It was the birth-place of his fancy; and he hardly knew what store he had set by its busy varieties of change and scene, until he saw the falling cloud that was to hide its pictures from him for ever. The gay bright regiments

The Old Royal Dover Road 5

Gravesend and Rochester, and the widening river was bearing the ships, white-sailed or black-smoked, out to sea, when I noticed by the wayside a very queer small boy.

“Holloa!” said I, to the very queer small boy, “where do you live?”

“At Chatham,” says he.

“What do you do there?” says I.

“I go to school,” says he.

I took him up in a moment, and we went on. Presently, the very queer small boy says, “This is Gadshill we are coming to, where Falstaff went out to rob those travellers, and ran away.”

“You know something about Falstaff, eh?” said I.

“All about him,” said the very queer small boy. “I am old (I am nine), and I read all sorts of books. But do let us stop at the top of the hill, and look at the house there, if you please!”

“You admire that house?” said I.

“Bless you, sir,” said the very queer small boy, “when I was not more than half as old as nine, it used to be a treat for me to be brought to look at it. And now I am nine, I come by myself to look at it. And ever since I can recollect, my father, seeing me so fond of it, has often said to me, ‘If you were to be very persevering, and were to work hard, you might some day come to live in it.’ Though that’s impossible!” said the very queer small boy, drawing a low breath, and now staring at the house out of window with all his might.

I was rather amazed to be told this by the very queer small boy; for that house happens to be *my* house, and I have reason to believe that what he said was true.

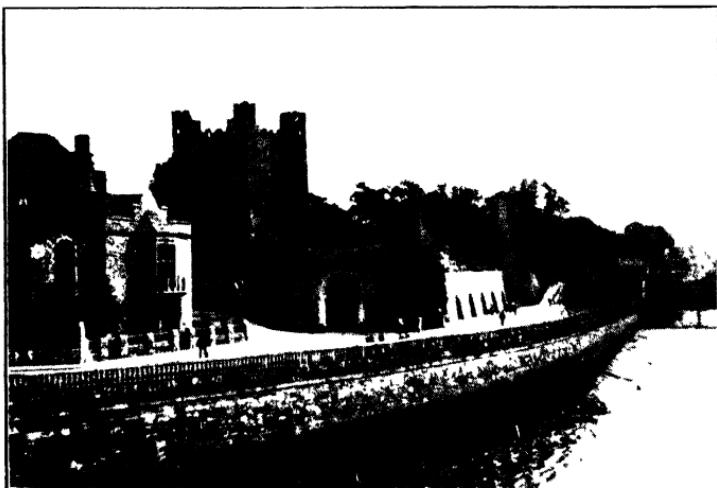
Here is an account of the situation of the house, written by Dickens in July, 1858, in a letter to his French friend, le Cerjat:

At this present moment I am on my little Kentish free-hold looking on as pretty a view out of my study window as you will find in a long day’s English ride. My little place is a grave red brick house (time of George the First, I suppose) which I have added to and stuck bits upon in all manner of ways, so that it is as pleasantly irregular, and as violently opposed to all architectural ideas, as the most hopeful man could possibly desire. It is on the summit of



GADS HILL PLACE

Photo by Walter Deeter



ROCHESTER CASTLE FROM THE BRIDGE

Photo by Walter Deeter

always going and coming, the continual paradiings and firings, the successions of sham sieges and sham defences, the plays got up by his cousin in the hospital, the navy-pay yacht in which he had sailed to Sheerness with his father, and the ships floating out in the Medway, with their far visions of sea—he was to lose them all. He was never to watch the boys at their games any more, or see them sham over again the sham sieges and defences. He was to be taken away to London inside the stage-coach Commodore; and Kentish woods and fields, Cobham Park and Hall, Rochester Cathedral and Castle, and all the woderful romance together, including a red-cheeked baby he had been wildly in love with were to vanish like a dream."

Rochester figures unde its own name in *The Pickwick Papers*, *David Copperfield* and *Christmas Stories*. As "Dull-borough Town," "Mudf g," and "Great Winglebury," it appears in *Sketches by Boz*. In *Great Expectations* it is "The Market Town" an l referred to as "Up town" and "Our town," and in *Edwin Drood*, "Cloisterhan"; and although Dickens often wrote of Rochester under a fictitious name, he made no concealment otherwise, that he was referring to the city he loved so dearly.

It is in *The Pickwick Papers* that Rochester first appears under its real name; and it is this book that commenced the romance centred in the city. "Mr. Pickwick and his three companions had resolved to make Rochester their first halting place."

With notebook and telescope Mr. Pickwick descended on the city, and a fund of genuine good humour, perennial in its freshness, was the result; and pilgrimages are made to Rochester, not so much to see its historic castle and ancient cathedral, as to see the places associated with the "Immortal Pickwick."

It was not until 1854 that Rochester again figured to any large extent in the stories he wrote. This time, the house known as Watts's Charity for Six Poor Travellers, was the subject of one of the Christmas numbers, which he entitled *The Seven Poor Travellers*, Dickens himself making the seventh traveller.

In 1860, *Great Expectations* appeared, and the "Market Town" of that book was, of course, Rochester, near to which he had lately come to reside.

Ten years later came *Edwin Drood*, and his fancy again turned to the cathedral city as the setting for the story; and he called the city Cloisterham.

An ancient city, Cloisterham, and no meet dwelling-place for anyone with hankерings after the noisy world. . . . A drowsy city, Cloisterham, whose inhabitants seem to suppose, with an inconsistency more strange than rare, that all its changes lie behind it, and that there are no more to come. . . . So silent are the streets of Cloisterham (though prone to echo on the smallest provocation), that of a summer-day the sun-blinds of its shops scarce dare to flap in the south wind; . . . the streets of Cloisterham city are little more than one narrow street by which you get into it and get out of it; the rest being mostly disappointing yards with pumps in them and no thoroughfare—exception made of the Cathedral-close, and a paved Quaker settlement . . . up in a shady corner.

In a word, a city of another and a bygone time is Cloisterham, with its hoarse cathedral-bell and its hoarse rooks hovering about the Cathedral tower.

His last description of Rochester and its Cathedral is as beautiful as any he ever penned:

A brilliant morning shines on the old city. Its antiquities and ruins are surpassingly beautiful. Changes of glorious light from moving boughs, songs of birds, scents from gardens, woods and fields . . . penetrate into the Cathedral, subdue its earthly odour, and preach the Resurrection and the Life. The cold stone tombs of centuries ago grow warm; and flecks of brightness dart into the sternest marble corners of the building, fluttering there like wings.

He was writing this in the Chalet at Gad's Hill on the afternoon of the June day that was to be his last on earth; a very few more words and *The Mystery of Edwin Drood* was laid aside for ever, to prove a mystery that is perhaps unsolvable. A few days before he had been seen in Rochester, “peeping about” the nooks and corners he loved so much, and it was thought that this last number would contain other word-pictures of the city; but no notes remained.

For a ramble round Rochester and Chatham, we cannot do better than follow in the tracks of Richard Doubledick and the Pickwickians and enter by the bridge across the Medway. It is not, however, the same bridge as that over

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which Doubledick "limped" or Mr. Pickwick leaned his portly frame "contemplating nature, and waiting for breakfast," and surveyed

The ruined wall, broken in many places, and in some, overhanging the narrow beach below in rude and heavy masses. . . . Behind it rose the ancient castle, its towers roofless, and its massive walls crumbling away, but telling us proudly of its own might and strength, as when, seven hundred years ago, it rang with the clash of arms, or resounded with the noise of feasting and revelry.

It is a rather ugly utilitarian sort of affair; but we can nevertheless get a glimpse of the Castle and Cathedral from between the ironworks, and echo the cry of Mr. Augustus Snodgrass.

"Magnificent ruin" said Mr. Augustus Snodgrass with all the poetic fervour that distinguished him. . . .

"What a sight for an antiquarian" were the very words which fell from Mr. Pickwick's mouth, as he applied his telescope to his eye.

"Ah! Fine place" said the stranger, "glorious pile, frowning walls—tottering arches . . . old cathedral too."

We now enter the "long straggling High Street," which Dickens as a boy used to think "was at least as wide as Regent Street, London," but which on revisiting in manhood, he found to be "little better than a lane."

The Crown Hotel at the foot of the bridge may have been the Crozier of *Edwin Drood*. It was formerly "Wright's"—the "next house" referred to by Mr. Jingle, when he cautioned Mr. Pickwick and his friends on no account to stay there. "Dear—very dear—half-a-crown in the bill if you look at the waiter—charge you more if you dine at a friend's than they would if you dined in the coffee room—rum fellows—very."

It was at the Bull almost next door that they had alighted, and Jingle's encomium "Good house—nice beds" is an excellent advertisement which the proprietor does not fail to use.

Although the Bull figures in *Great Expectations* as the Blue Boar and in *The Seven Poor Travellers*, its principal claim to remembrance rests with *The Pickwick Papers*, and the Ballroom upstairs is intact as it was when Dickens peopled it with the "dockyard people of upper rank" who didn't know

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“dockyard people of lower rank” who in turn didn’t know “small gentry” and so on.

The “elevated den” in which “the musicians were securely confined” is still to be seen.

The stairs leading up to the Ballroom, are, as described in “The Great Winklebury Duel,”

A great wide rambling staircase, three stairs and a landing—four stairs and another landing—one step and another landing—half a dozen stairs and another landing—and so on.

and we recall that they figure in Phiz’s drawing of Jingle in Mr. Winkle’s dress clothes with the P.C. button, defying Dr. Slammer, which as we all know, resulted in the famous duel at Fort Pitt the next day, when the innocent Mr. Winkle was discovered to be “the wrong man” at the eleventh hour.

Mr. Winkle’s bedroom was inside Mr. Tupman’s, and we find these two rooms in Nos. 13 and 19. Room No. 17 is Mr. Pickwick’s room, the same as Dickens himself is said to have occupied more than once.

Opposite the Bull is the Town Hall, “a grave red-brick building,” an edifice which Dickens informs us in “Dullborough Town” had appeared to him in his boyhood’s days, “so glorious a structure that I had set it up in my mind as the model on which the Genie of the Lamp built the Palace for Aladdin.”

“A queer place” thought Pip when he went there to be bound apprentice to Joe, “with higher pews in it than in a church . . . and with some shining black portraits on the walls, which my unartistic eye regarded as a composition of hardbake and sticking-plaister.”

Almost opposite, the Cathedral can be seen and we reach it by passing “an old stone gatehouse crossing the close with an arched thoroughfare passing beneath it.” This is known as Jasper’s Gate House from its connection with Dickens’s last story, *Edwin Drood*: passing through the archway we find the house of the Verger Tope on the left.

Rochester Cathedral has many associations with Dickens, particularly with *Edwin Drood*, in which book the city is thinly disguised as Cloisterham. Said Mr. Sapsea in showing the principal sights of his city:

This is our Cathedral, sir. The best judges are pleased to admire it, and the best among our townsmen own to being a little vain of it. . . . Mr. Datchery admired the

Cathedral and Mr. Sapsea pointed it out as if he himself had invented and built it.

Previous to the advent of the "old buffer" Dick Datchery, Mr. Grewgious had visited the Cathedral, and "Crossing the Close, paused at the great western folding door of the Cathedral, which stood open on the fine and bright, though short-lived, afternoon, for the airing of the place. 'Dear me,' said Mr. Grewgious, peeping in, 'it's like looking down the throat of Old Time.'"

Dickens tells us in *The Seven Poor Travellers* that he "had been wandering about the neighbouring Cathedral and had seen the tomb of Richard Watts, with the effigy of worthy Master Richard starting out of it like a ship's figurehead."

Below this effigy of Watts is a tablet of brass to connect the memory of Dickens "with the scenes in which his earliest and his latest years were passed and with the associations of Rochester Cathedral and its neighbourhood which extended over all his life."

Returning to the Cathedral Close we see the little burial ground where Dickens expressed a desire to be buried, but it was found to be full and the greater claim of Westminster Abbey prevailed.

The famous Sapsea vault with its inscription was in this burial ground and plays an important part in the story of *Edwin Drood*.

The Cathedral Close is also often referred to in *Edwin Drood*, Sir Luke Fildes's picture, "Under the Trees," depicts a part of it; for here the breaking off of the engagement between Edwin and Rosa, was first suggested: and here, after they had taken a walk by the river, they decided to say goodbye to each other.

Beyond the west door of the Cathedral we can easily reach Minor Canon Row to which reference is made in *The Seven Poor Travellers*:

A wonderfully quaint row of red-brick tenements inhabited by the Minor-Canons. They had odd little porches over the doors, like sounding-boards over old pulpits; and I thought I should like to see one of the Minor-Canons come out upon his top step, and favour us with a little Christmas discourse about the poor scholars of Rochester.

This was the Minor Canon Corner of *Edwin Drood*, where

the Rev. Canon Crisparkle lived with his Ma, the "China Shepherdess."

Minor Canon Corner was a quiet place in the shadow of the Cathedral, which the cawing of the rooks, the echoing footsteps of rare passers, the sound of the Cathedral bell, or the roll of the Cathedral organ seemed to render more quiet than absolute silence.

On Boley Hill is situated the one-time residence of Richard Watts, called Satis House. It is said that Dickens transferred the name of this house to Restoration House (see page 15) when giving a home to Miss Havisham in *Great Expectations*.

Returning to the High Street, and turning to the right, we see the quaintly gabled Watts's Charity, better known as the House of the Seven Poor Travellers after the Christmas story of that name.

Strictly speaking, there were only six Poor Travellers; but, being a traveller myself, though an idle one, and being withal as poor as I hope to be, I brought the number up to seven. This word of explanation is due at once, for what says the inscription over the quaint old door?

RICHARD WATTS, ESQUIRE
by his will dated 22nd August, 1579
founded this Charity,
for Six Poor Travellers
Who, not being Rogues or Proctors
May receive gratis for one Night,
Lodging, Entertainment
and Fourpence each.

It was in the ancient little city of Rochester, in Kent, of all the good days in the year upon a Christmas Eve, that I stood reading this inscription over the quaint old door in question. . . . I stepped backward into the road to survey my inheritance. I found it to be a clean, white house, of a staid and venerable air, with the quaint old door already three times mentioned (an arched door), choice little long low lattice-windows, and a roof of three gables.

Dickens then proceeds to give us an interesting pen picture of the High Street and the Castle.

The silent High-street of Rochester is full of gables, with old beams and timbers carved into strange faces. It

is oddly garnished with a queer old clock that projects over the pavement out of a grave red-brick building, as if Time carried on business there, and hung out his sign. Sooth to say, he did an active stroke of work in Rochester, in the old days of the Romans, and the Saxons, and the Normans; and down to the times of King John, when the rugged castle—I will not undertake to say how many hundreds of years old then—was abandoned to the centuries of weather which have so defaced the dark apertures in its walls, that the ruin looks as if the rooks and daws had pecked its eyes out.

Having seen over the house, Dickens hit upon the idea of entertaining the Six Poor Travellers that evening, and himself making a seventh.

With this in view he returned to the Bull Hotel and from his bedroom “could smell a delicious savour of Turkey and Roast Beef rising to the window.” Here he “made a glorious jorum” of Wassail, in a brown pitcher.

On the stroke of nine he set out for Watts’s Charity, carrying his “brown beauty” (the pitcher of Wassail) in his arms, the supper following in procession:

“As we passed along the High Street, comet-like, we left a long tail of fragrance behind us which caused the public to stop, sniffing in wonder.”

A little further along the High Street on the same side as Watts’s Charity is a venerable brick edifice, now a museum, known as Eastgate House, which figured in *Edwin Drood* as the Nuns’ House, the Seminary for Young Ladies, kept by Miss Twinkleton, at which Rosa was a pupil:

In the midst of Cloisterham stands the Nuns’ House: a venerable brick edifice, whose present appellation is doubtless derived from the legend of its conventional uses. On the trim gate enclosing its old courtyard is a resplendent brass plate flashing forth the legend: “Seminary for Young Ladies. Miss Twinkleton.” The house-front is so old and worn, and the brass plate is so shining and staring, that the general result has reminded imaginative strangers of a battered old beau with a large modern eye-glass stuck in his blind eye.

The house is marked with a tablet bearing the City Arms and an inscription connecting it with Dickens.

“Over against the Nuns’ House” was, we are told, the residence of Mr. Sapsea, auctioneer, “the purest jackass in

Cloisterham"; and there, opposite us, is a quaint collection of gabled houses.

Mr. Sapsea's premises are in the High-street, over against the Nuns' House. They are of about the period of the Nuns' House, irregularly modernised here and there, as steadily deteriorating generations found, more and more, that they preferred air and light to Fever and the Plague. Over the doorway is a wooden effigy, about half life-size, representing Mr. Sapsea's father, in a curly wig and toga, in the act of selling.

At one time a carved wooden figure of an auctioneer, such as Dickens describes, actually did grace the doorway.

The first turning on the right after passing Watts's Charity, is the Maidstone Road.

When Jasper made his first tour of inspection with Durdles, he returned in this direction from the Cathedral crypt.

They have but to cross what was once the vineyard, belonging to what was once the Monastery, to come into the narrow back lane wherein stands the crazy wooden house of two low stories currently known as the Travellers' Twopenny:—a house all warped and distorted, like the morals of the travellers, with scant remains of a lattice-work porch over the door, and also of a rustic fence before its stamped-out garden.

The Vineyard referred to is now a public garden, called the Vines, and there is a pleasant walk across it into Minor Canon Row and the Cathedral.

On the evening of his disappearance Edwin wandered in this direction and met the old opium woman, who warned him that Edwin was a "threatened name."

Opposite the Vines is an ancient house of striking picturesqueness, known as Restoration House; but to Dickens's readers it is the house of Miss Havisham, that figures so largely in *Great Expectations*.

Miss Havisham was "an immensely rich and grim lady," who, we are told, lived "in a large and dismal house barricaded against robbers and who led a life of seclusion." Pip thus made his first acquaintance with it!

Within a quarter of an hour we came to Miss Havisham's house, which was of old brick, and dismal, and had a great many iron bars to it. Some of the windows had

been walled up; of those that remained, all the lower were rustily barred. There was a court-yard in front, and that was barred; so, we had to wait, after ringing the bell, until some one should come to open it.

A walk in this direction was a great favourite with Dickens. "He would turn out of Rochester High Street" says Forster, "through the Vines (where some old buildings, from one of which called Restoration House he took Satis House for *Great Expectations*), had a curious attraction for him."

It is on record that the day before his death he took this walk and was noticed resting near the spot, and so attentively engaged in observing the house, that it was thought likely he would introduce it into the story. The chapter he wrote on his return—the last—had reference to the spot.

At the commencement of Star Hill, is the Conservative Club, formerly the Theatre Royal, where Jingle acted and which Dickens often visited when a boy.

We now arrive at about the spot where Rochester ends and Chatham begins; we will not attempt to define it, preferring to remain in the happy ignorance of Richard Doubledick (*The Seven Poor Travellers*), who said:

"If anybody . . . knows to a nicety where Rochester ends and Chatham begins, it is more than I do."

v

At the top of Star Hill we follow New Road, which branches off to the left. To the right are the recreation grounds, rented from the military authorities by the Corporation of Chatham. Across the recreation grounds to the right is Fort Pitt, and beyond it a meadow, the scene of the memorable duel that was to have been between Mr. Winkle and Dr. Slammer.

Leaving Fort Pitt and turning to the left we reach Ordnance Terrace. Here at No. 11 (then No. 2) Charles Dickens lived as a boy, from 1817, for about three years. The house bears a tablet to the effect that Charles Dickens lived there from 1817 to 1821.

Dickens's first school, not reckoning the primary lessons he received at his mother's knee, was near the railway station, not far from Ordnance Terrace. Behind the school was the playing field of many pleasant memories, but also, like many other things, it has gone.

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Here Dickens received his earliest impressions which in due time were transferred to his earliest *Sketches by Boz*.

Leaving the station by way of Railway Street, we reach High Street, Chatham, once again. Crossing the road, and continuing straight on down Military Road, we find on our right a street oddly called The Brook. A short way down this street, on the right-hand, is a lodging-house, No. 18, St. Mary's Place, bearing a tablet announcing that Charles Dickens lived there from 1821 to 1823. The factory next door was at one time a chapel presided over by a Baptist minister, whose son, William Giles, kept a school, to which young Charles was forthwith sent.

It was in this Chatham house that he made acquaintance with the books that had so great an influence on his later life, as he told us in *David Copperfield*:

My father had left a small collection of books in a little room upstairs to which I had access (for it adjoined my own), and which nobody else in our house ever troubled . . . a glorious host, to keep me company. They kept alive my fancy, and my hope of something beyond that place and time. . . . When I think of it, the picture always rises in my mind, of a summer evening, the boys at play in the churchyard, and I sitting on my bed, reading as if for life. Every barn in the neighbourhood, every stone in the church, and every foot of the churchyard, had some association of its own, in my mind, connected with these books, and stood for some locality made famous in them. I have seen Tom Pipes go climbing up the church-steeple; I have watched Strap, with the knapsack on his back, stopping to rest himself upon the wicket-gate; and I *know* that Commodore Trunnion held that club with Mr. Pickle, in the parlour of our little village alehouse.

When Dickens was eleven, the family left Chatham for London.

Chatham Lines are not far from The Brook, and we soon reach the scene of the "grand review" which Mr. Pickwick visited, where he lost his hat, and found an acquaintance in the jovial Mr. Wardle and family.

Forster tells us that one of the favourite walks of Dickens, when he came to live at Gad's Hill, was "by Rochester and the Medway, to the Chatham Lines. He would . . . pass round by Fort Pitt, and coming back by Frindsbury would

bring himself by some cross fields again into the high-road."

In the High Street of Chatham is the Mitre Inn, which has a personal association with the boyhood of Dickens. In the days when the Dickens family lived in Chatham the landlord of the Mitre was John Tribe and the two families were on visiting terms, and young Charles and his sister Fanny used to sing duets at parties held there.

In *The Holly Tree Inn* there is a distinct reference to the Mitre:

There was an Inn in the cathedral town where I went to school. . . . It was the Inn where friends used to put up, and where we used to go to see parents, and to have salmon and fowls, and be tipped. It had an ecclesiastical sign—the Mitre—and a bar that seemed to be the next best thing to a bishopric, it was so snug.

Nearly opposite the Mitre stood the Mechanics' Institute, in aid of the funds of which Dickens gave several readings from his works.

David Copperfield reached Rochester at the end of the second day of his tramp to Dover, and

Toiling into Chatham,—which, in that night's aspect, is a mere dream of chalk, and drawbridges, and mastless ships in a muddy river, roofed like Noah's arks,—crept at last, upon a sort of grass-grown battery overhanging a lane, where a sentry was walking to and fro. Here I lay down, near a cannon; and, happy in the society of the sentry's footsteps, . . . slept soundly until morning.

It was at Chatham that he decided to sell his jacket. "It was a likely place to sell a jacket in; for the dealers in second-hand clothes were numerous, and were, generally speaking, on the look-out for customers at their shop-doors." He found one that "looked promising, at the corner of a dirty lane, ending in an enclosure full of stinging nettles." Here he encountered the ugly old man who, with his "eyes and limbs," "lungs and liver," "oh goroo goroo," bid him "go fer fourpence"!

When at length David got free of the old clothes-dealer at Chatham, he was "faint and weary" and "limped seven miles" upon the road.

My bed at night was under another haystack. . . . When I took the road again next morning, I found that it lay through a succession of hop grounds and orchards. . . . I thought it extremely beautiful, and made up my mind to sleep among the hops that night, imagining some cheerful companionship in the long perspective of poles, with the graceful leaves twining round them.

This must have brought him to about Newington, thirty-seven miles from London. It was on the Tuesday morning that he fell in with the tramping tinker, probably near Sittingbourne. That night he slept among the hops again, and in the heat of the following day passed through "the sunny street of Canterbury, dozing as it were in the hot light; and with the sight of its old houses and gateways, and the stately, grey cathedral, with the rooks sailing round the towers."

When at length he reached his aunt's and it was decided to send him to school, it was to Canterbury he went, to the house of Mr. Wickfield, his aunt's lawyer, the original of which is said to be at No. 71 St. Dunstan's Street, near to the West Gate. It is described as follows:

A very old house bulging out over the road; a house with long, low lattice-windows bulging out still farther, and beams with carved heads on the ends bulging out too, so that I fancied the whole house was leaning forward, trying to see who was passing on the narrow pavement below.

Dr. Strong's school, to which David was sent by his aunt, is said to have had its prototype in the King's School. It was "a grave building in a courtyard with a learned air about it that seemed very well suited to the stray rooks and jackdaws who came down from the Cathedral Towers to walk with a clerkly bearing on the grass plot."

Uriah Heep's "umble dwelling" is said to have been situated in North Lane, but the house is now demolished.

The "County Inn" at which Mr. Dick put up was probably the Fountain Hotel, at which Dickens stayed on his reading tour in 1861.

Another Canterbury inn, also figuring in *David Copperfield*, was no doubt the Sun Inn, close to the Cathedral:

It was a little inn where Mr. Micawber put up, and he occupied a little room in it, partitioned off from the commercial room, and strongly flavoured with tobacco smoke.

I think it was over the kitchen, because a warm, greasy smell appeared to come up through the chinks in the floor, and there was a flabby perspiration on the walls. I know it was near the bar, on account of the smell of spirits and jingling of glasses.

This visit was on the occasion of Mr. Micawber's prospecting in the Medway coal trade.

We saw, I think, the greater part of the Medway . . . being so near here. Mr. Micawber was of the opinion that it would be rash not to come on and see the Cathedral. Firstly, on account of its being so well worth seeing, and our never having seen it; and secondly, on account of the great probability of something turning up in a Cathedral city.

It was at the Sun Inn that David, his aunt, Mr. Dick and Traddles stopped when they went down to Canterbury to assist Mr. Micawber in the unmasking of Uriah Heep.

On 4th November, 1861, Dickens gave a reading at Canterbury and wrote to his daughter Maimie the same evening, calling it "Windy night," from the Fountain Hotel :

An excellent house to-night, and an audience positively perfect. The greatest part of it stalls and an intelligent and delightful response in them, like the touch of a beautiful instrument. *Copperfield* wound up in a real burst of feeling and delight.

VII

And now, we, like David Copperfield, come upon "the bare, wide downs near Dover."

In reaching "the place so long desired" he felt that he had reached the "first great aim" of his journey. Even then he was not certain his aunt actually did live at Dover; his enquiries of Peggotty had been rather vague and he was told that "Miss Betsy lived near Dover, but whether at Dover itself, at Hythe, Sandgate, or Folkestone, she could not say." However, finding out that all these places were close together, he had set out for Dover, and had arrived there at last, on the sixth day of his flight.

He tells us how he enquired about his aunt among the boatmen first, and received various answers, mostly "jocular" and all "disrespectful." At length, worn out,

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he describes himself as “ deliberating ” whilst “ sitting on the step of an empty shop at a street corner, near the market-place.”

This shop is claimed to be that of a firm of bakers, Messrs. Iggleston & Greaves, who have fixed a tablet to their new premises, on the site of the old shop, to record the fictional incident.

Through the help of a good-natured fly-driver he became acquainted with his aunt’s maid, and followed her until he came to

A very neat little cottage with cheerful bow-windows: in front of it, a small square gravelled court or garden, full of flowers carefully tended, and smelling deliciously.

Here, he discovered his aunt—busy with her donkey scaring, and Phiz’s excellent drawing of the meeting will at once be called to mind, no less than Dickens’s description of the memorable scene.

There is no cottage at Dover that can be said to have been the original of that of Miss Trotwood. It is thought probable that Dickens simply transferred the locale from Broadstairs, where the original of David’s aunt is said to have been a reality—see page 34. Dickens wrote a portion of the book at Broadstairs, and although Dover was known to him, yet, so far as we can trace, he had not stayed there for any length of time prior to writing the story.

Dickens took up his residence in Dover for three months in 1852, living at No. 10 Camden Crescent: he was engaged on *Bleak House* at the time. His opinion of the place, expressed in a letter written at the time, was that it was not quite a place to his taste, being too prone to itinerant music, and “infinitely too genteel.” “But” he added:

The sea is very fine, and the walks are quite remarkable. There are two ways of going to Folkestone, both lovely and striking in the highest degree; and there are heights and downs, and country roads, and I don’t know what, everywhere.

The town undoubtedly attracted Dickens, for we find him writing from the Ship Hotel there in April and May 1856, speaking of his walks to Deal and back, and “ over the downs towards Canterbury in a gale of wind.” Three years later *A Tale of Two Cities* was written, and with it an account of Dover, as viewed by Mr. Jarvis Lorry in a walk after breakfast.

The Royal George Hotel, where Mr. Lorry always stayed, was undoubtedly the Ship where Dickens himself used to put up at. Later he stayed at the Lord Warden, and was on very friendly terms with the proprietor, Mr. Birmingham, and his wife. One letter from the Lord Warden Hotel—to Wilkie Collins—dated 24th May, 1861, is worth quoting:

Of course I am dull and penitent here, but it is very beautiful. I can work well, and I walked, by the cliffs, to Folkestone and back to-day, when it was so exquisitely beautiful that, though I was alone, I could not keep silence on the subject. In the fourteen miles I doubt if I met twelve people.

On the 5th November, 1861, he gave a reading at Dover and described the audience as that with the greatest sense of humour.

The effect of the readings at . . . Dover really seems to have outdone the best usual impression; . . . they wouldn't go but sat applauding like mad . . . the audience with the greatest sense of humour certainly is at Dover. The people in the stalls set the example of laughing, in the most curiously unreserved way; and they laughed with such really cordial enjoyment when Squeers read the boys' letters, that the contagion extended to me. For one couldn't hear them without laughing too.

For fuller particulars of *The Kent of Dickens*, the reader is referred to a volume of that title by the present writer, published by the same publisher as this book, price 6/- *nett*.

CHAPTER TWO

THE BIRTHPLACE PILGRIMAGE

I

THE road that leads to Portsmouth, the birthplace of Dickens, is somewhat overshadowed by the road that had a far greater fascination for him, with which we have dealt in our first chapter. Chatham and Rochester, which he knew when the first real rememberings of life dawned upon him, meant far more to him than any part of Portsmouth, and there is only one connection between his native place and any of his books, and that is in *Nicholas Nickleby*.

Nicholas, freed from the Yorkshire school, and befriending poor Smike, paid but a fleeting visit to London, and then went off, on foot, to seek fortune elsewhere.

Newman Noggs insisted on accompanying them on the first part of their journey, and enquired, "Which way?" "To Kingston, first," replied Nicholas; but he would give no further indication of his destination, because, as he said, he hardly knew himself. However, his plans had been a little more definitely fixed in his mind, as after Newman had left them, Nicholas informed Smike that they were bound for Portsmouth, hoping, as Portsmouth was a seaport town, to get some employment there on board ship.

Kingston was passed by Betty Higden in her flight from the terror of the workhouse, and in *Oliver Twist*, when dealing with the Chertsey burglary, we read that Blathers and Duff set off for Kingston on hearing that two men and a boy were in the cage there, apprehended under suspicious circumstances, only to find that they had no connection whatever with the burglary.

The description of the first day's journey of Nicholas and Smike is unfortunately lacking in topographic details, and might appertain to any walk along the highway on a summer's day; but it is worth repeating here:

A broad, fine, honest sun lighted up the green pastures and dimpled water with the semblance of summer, while it left the travellers all the invigorating freshness of that early time of year. The ground seemed elastic under their feet; the sheep-bells were music to their ears; and exhilarated by exercise, and stimulated by hope, they pushed onward with the strength of lions.

The day wore on, and all these bright colours subsided, and assumed a quieter tint, like young hopes softened down by time, or youthful features by degrees resolving into the calm and serenity of age. But they were scarcely less beautiful in their slow decline, than they had been in their prime; for nature gives to every time and season some beauties of its own; and from morning to night, as from the cradle to the grave, is but a succession of changes so gentle and easy, that we can scarcely mark their progress.

There is no mention of the town of Guildford, with its projecting "moon faced clock" in the High Street, to remind Dickens of his beloved Rochester. Guildford, however, was the place from which Mr. Vincent Crummles and his company had proceeded to Portsmouth, having fulfilled an engagement there "with the greatest applause"; and in a later chapter, Mr. Lillywick explains his escape from the jealousies of the Kenwigs family, and tells Nicholas:

"Henrietta Petowker (it was settled between us) should come down here to her friends, the Crummleses, under pretence of this engagement, and I should go down to Guildford the day before, and join her on the coach there; which I did, and we came down from Guildford yesterday together."

It was somewhere in the neighbourhood of Guildford that David Copperfield spent a day of great bliss with Dora, when "it was all Dora" to him. "The sun shone Dora and the birds sang Dora." Such was his ecstasy that he hardly knew where they went, but thought it was "near Guildford." "It was a green spot on a hill, carpeted with soft turf. There were shady trees, and heather, and, as far as the eye could see, a rich landscape." Here it was that he met that mortal foe "Red Whisker." •

at Dorking the redoubtable Mrs. Weller kept the Marquis of Granby public house, to which on a certain occasion Mr. Samuel Weller, in his best clothes, journeyed "on the top of the Arundel Coach."

The Marquis of Granby in Mrs. Weller's time was quite a model of a road-side public-house of the better class—just large enough to be convenient, and small enough to be snug. On the opposite side of the road was a large sign-board on a high post, representing the head and shoulders of a gentleman with an apoplectic countenance, in a red coat with deep blue facings, and a touch of the same blue over his three-cornered hat, for a sky. Over that again were a pair of flags; beneath the last button of his coat were a couple of cannon; and the whole formed an expressive and undoubted likeness of the Marquis of Granby of glorious memory.

The bar window displayed a choice collection of geranium plants, and a well-dusted row of spirit phials. The open shutters bore a variety of golden inscriptions, eulogistic of good beds and neat wines; and the choice group of countrymen and hostlers lounging about the stable-door and horse-trough, afforded presumptive proof of the excellent quality of the ale and spirits which were sold within. Sam Weller paused, when he dismounted from the coach, to note all these little indications of a thriving business, with the eye of an experienced traveller; and having done so, stepped in at once, highly satisfied with everything he had observed.

On the occasion of Sam's visit to the Marquis after the death of his mother-in-law, we read:

It was just seven o'clock when Samuel Weller, alighting from the box of a stage-coach which passed through Dorking, stood within a few hundred yards of the Marquis of Granby. It was a cold, dull evening; the little street looked dreary and dismal; and the mahogany countenance of the noble and gallant Marquis seemed to wear a more sad and melancholy expression than it was wont to do, as it swung to and fro, creaking mournfully in the wind. The blinds were pulled down, and the shutters partly closed; of the knot of loungers that usually collected about the door, not one was to be seen; the place was silent and desolate.

What a pity it is that Dickens did not know Dorking better, or that he did not locate the "Markis Gran," as the elder

Weller once wrote it, in a place with which he was familiar, and call it by its proper name. There is no Marquis of Granby at Dorking; the nearest approach to it at the present time is the King's Arms; although, the White Horse also claims that distinction.

The writer of an article in *All the Year Round* for September 18th, 1869, stated that the King's Head (now the Post Office) a great coaching house on the Brighton Road in the old days, was "the famed house, where the fatal widow beguiled old Weller." This statement must have come under Dickens's notice, yet we can hardly believe the "road-side public house" of Mrs. Weller to have had its origin in so important a coaching house as the King's Head.

III

Godalming, not quite half-way, was chosen by Nicholas, who had borrowed a map for the purpose, as the resting-place for the first night. "To Godalming they came at last," we read, and here "they bargained for two humble beds, and slept soundly."

The second day found Nicholas and Smike crossing Hind-head, and of this portion of the road, Dickens gives an excellent pen picture:

It was a harder day's journey than yesterday's, for there were long and weary hills to climb; and in journeys, as in life, it is a great deal easier to go down hill.

They walked upon the rim of the Devil's Punch Bowl; and Smike listened with greedy interest as Nicholas read the inscription upon the stone which, reared upon that wild spot, tells of a murder committed there by night. The grass on which they stood, had once been dyed with gore; and the blood of the murdered man had run down, drop by drop, into the hollow which gives the place its name. "The Devil's Bowl," thought Nicholas, as he looked into the void, "never held fitter liquor than that!"

The stone by the roadside tells the story to which Dickens refers, of the unknown sailor who was brutally murdered at this spot and whose body was flung into the valley below.

Onward they kept, with steady purpose, and entered at length upon a wide and spacious tract of downs, with every variety of little hill and plain to change their verdant surface. Here, there shot up, almost perpendicularly,

into the sky, a height so steep, as to be hardly accessible to any but the sheep and goats that fed upon its sides, and there, stood a mound of green, sloping and tapering off so delicately, and merging so gently into the level ground, that you could scarce define its limits. Hills swelling above each other; and undulations, shapely and uncouth, smooth and rugged, graceful and grotesque, thrown negligently side by side, bounded the view in each direction; while frequently, with unexpected noise, there uprose from the ground, a flight of crows, who, cawing and wheeling round the nearest hills, as if uncertain of their course, suddenly poised themselves upon the wing and skimmed down the long vista of some opening valley, with the speed of light itself.

By degrees, the prospect receded more and more on either hand, as they had been shut out from rich and extensive scenery, so they emerged once again upon the open country.

This is a very truthful picture of the road from the top of Hindhead, over Butser Hill and across the Oxenbourne Downs, to Petersfield beyond which, at a roadside inn, the travellers halted. "Thus, twilight had already closed in, when they turned off the path to the door of a road-side inn, yet twelve miles short of Portsmouth."

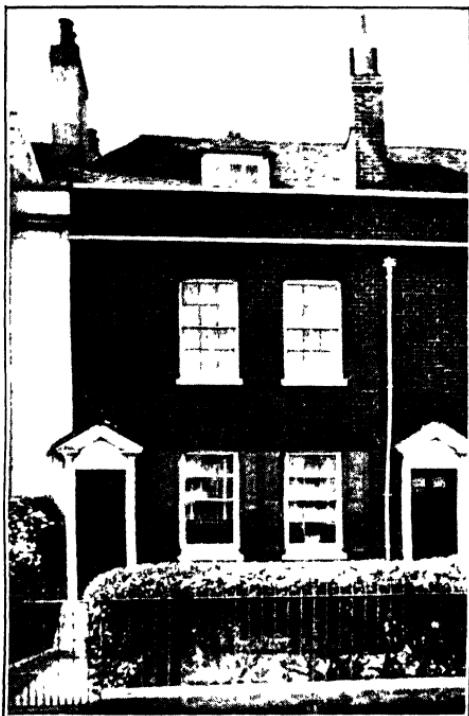
The Coach and Horses is the inn that is there to-day, but this was not in existence in those days. Mr. C. G. Harper in "The Portsmouth Road," points out that the gamekeeper's cottage near by, was formerly known as the Bottom Inn, and must have been the one Dickens had in mind, as there was no other inn for miles about.

Here Nicholas made the acquaintance of Vincent Crummles and his two boys. The next day, in the "vehicle of unknown design," drawn by the "strange four legged animal . . . which he called a pony," Mr. Crummles conveyed Nicholas and Smike to Portsmouth.

IV

Dickens was born at that part of Portsmouth which is called Landport, on the 7th February, 1812. The address at that time was 1, Mile End Terrace, Portsea; but it is now known as 393, Commercial Road, Portsmouth, and the house has been the property of the Corporation since 1903 and is open to the public as a museum.

It is a small house of four rooms and two attics. The front bedroom is believed to be the room in which Dickens



DICKENS'S BIRTHPLACE

Photo by T. H. Treadell



THE HARD, PORTSMOUTH

was born. The family left this house for another in Hawke Street, when Dickens was about two years of age.

Dolby, in his book, "Charles Dickens as I Knew Him," tells an amusing story connected with Dickens's reading in Portsmouth in May, 1866, where his first provincial tour with Dolby as his manager, ended.

"In the hope that the sea breezes might have the effect of relieving Mr. Dickens of the cold from which he was still suffering, we decided to visit Southsea before the Portsmouth Reading. And here two amusing incidents occurred.

"On the morning after our arrival we set out for a walk, and turning the corner of a street suddenly found ourselves in Landport Terrace. The name of the street catching Mr. Dickens's eye, he suddenly exclaimed, 'By Jove! here is the place where I was born; and, acting on his suggestion, we walked up and down the terrace for some time, speculating as to which of the houses had the right to call itself his cradle. Beyond a recollection that there was a small front garden to the house he had no idea of the place—for he was only two years old when his father was removed to London from Portsmouth. As the houses were nearly all alike, and each had a small front garden, we were not much helped in our quest by Mr. Dickens's recollections, and great was the laughter at his humorous conjectures. He must have lived in one house because 'it looked so like his father'; another one must have been his home because it looked like the birthplace of a man who had deserted it; a third was very like the cradle of a puny, weak youngster such as he had been; and so on, through the row. According to his own account, Southsea had not contributed much to his physical strength, neither indeed had Chatham; for, he used to say, he always was a puny, weak youngster, and never used to join in games with the same zest that other boys seemed to have. He never was remarkable, according to his own account, during his younger days, for anything but violent spasmodic attacks, which used to utterly prostrate him, and for indomitable energy in reading: cricket, 'chevy,' top, marbles, 'peg in the ring,' 'tor,' 'three holes,' or any of the thousand and one boys' games, had no charm for him, save such as lay in watching others play. But as none of the houses in Landport Terrace could cry out and say, as he recounted these facts, 'That boy was born here!' the mystery remained unsolved, and we passed on.

"The other incident occurred in the course of the same walk. It is well-known what interest Mr. Dickens took in

all matters connected with prison life; and Mr. Wills having mentioned that he was intimately acquainted with the governor of a military prison somewhere in Gosport (the name of which; also the name of the governor, he had forgotten), a search was made, in the hope of refreshing Wills's memory. After walking some distance through clouds of dust, driven by a cold easterly wind (by no means unusual in England in the month of May), and meeting no one on the road, either of a civil, naval, or military character, able to give any information about the prison, it was suggested that the institution existed only in Wills's imagination; a suspicion which broadened into a fact when inquiries were made of the landlord of a most comfortable-looking hostelry on the roadside.

"Returning to Southsea by another road, we suddenly found ourselves in a sort of elongated 'square,' that should be called 'oblong,' open at each end, such as is to be met with in Dutch towns; the houses on each side resembled a scene 'set' for the comic business of a pantomime; they were of red brick, with clean windows and white window frames, while green jalousie blinds of the most dazzling description added a little to the 'tone of the place.' Here the temptation to Mr. Dickens to indulge his predilections for imitating the frolics of a Clown—of the Grimaldi, Flexmore, and Tom Matthews type—presented itself. The street being entirely free from people, Mr. Dickens mounted three steps leading to one of the houses, which had an enormous brass plate on its green door; and having given three raps on the doorpost, was proceeding to lie down on the upper step, clown fashion, when the door suddenly opened and a stout woman appeared, to the intense amusement of the 'pantaloons' (myself) and Wills, who immediately beat a retreat in the style known in pantomime as a 'rally', followed by Mr. Dickens with an imaginary policeman after him. The wind, which was very high at the time, added to the frolic, driving Mr. Dickens's hat before it, in the direction of the river, causing us to forget the situation and eagerly chase the hat to catch it ere the frolicsome blast drove it into the water. Then, and then only, we turned to take a parting look at the scene of action, when, to our dismay, we saw every doorstep and doorway occupied by the amused tenants of the houses. There was another stampede, which was stopped by an open drain, from which emanated an odour of anything but a pleasant character, suddenly making the party pale as ghosts, and necessitating the administration, m&edicinally, of course, of a strong dose of brandy-and-water at the nearest hotel."

Two readings were given on this occasion, at the St. George's Hall, Portsea, on 24th and 25th May, these being the final ones in Portsmouth. The only other occasion on which Dickens gave Readings in his native town was on the 11th November, 1858, when he read both in the afternoon and evening, also at the St. George's Hall. We are indebted to Mr. James Hutt, the Chief Librarian of Portsmouth, for this information, and it may be taken as final as regards Dickens's readings in Portsmouth, other dates having been discarded only after thorough search.

Dickens possessed no special regard for his birthplace, as the story of Dolby would go to show, and his only official visits to his native town were on the above-mentioned occasions of his readings in 1858 and 1866.

According to Forster, Dickens and he made a journey to Portsmouth in 1838, for local colour for the Crummles scenes.

"I perfectly recollect" says Forster, "that, on our being at Portsmouth together while he was writing *Nickleby* he recognised the exact shape of the military parade seen by him as an infant, on the same spot, a quarter of a century before."

When Nicholas Nickleby and Smike arrived at Portsmouth with Mr. Vincent Crummles, we read that:

They arrived at the drawbridge at Portsmouth, when Mr. Crummles pulled up.

"We'll get down here," said the manager, "and the boys will take him round to the stable, and call at my lodgings with the luggage. You had better let yours be taken there, for the present."

Thanking Mr. Vincent Crummles for his obliging offer, Nicholas jumped out, and, giving Smike his arm, accompanied the manager up High Street on their way to the theatre; feeling nervous and uncomfortable enough at the prospect of an immediate introduction to a scene so new to him.

They passed a great many bills, pasted against the walls and displayed in windows, wherein the names of Mr. Vincent Crummles, Mrs.• Vincent Crummles, Master Crummles, Master P. Crummles, and Miss Crummles, were printed in very large letters, and everything else in very small ones; and, turning at length into an entry, in which was a strong smell of orange-peel and lamp-oil, with an under-current of saw-dust, groped their way through a dark passage, and, descending a step or two, threaded

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a little maze of canvas screens and paint-pots, and emerged upon the stage of the Portsmouth Theatre.

The old Portsmouth Theatre was in the High Street, where the Cambridge Barracks now stand.

After some trouble Nicholas found suitable lodgings in The Hard, over a tobacconist's:

There is no lack of comfortable furnished apartments in Portsmouth, . . . eventually . . . they stumbled upon two small rooms up three pair of stairs, or rather two pair and a ladder, at a tobacconist's shop, on the Common Hard; a dirty street leading down to the dockyard. These Nicholas engaged, only too happy to have escaped any request for payment of a week's rent before-hand.

It was in a street quite close, Hawke Street, that the Dickens family lived at No. 16, after young Charles's birth, and before removing to Chatham.

The lodgings occupied by other members of the theatrical company were closer to the Theatre.

St. Thomas's Street is parallel with High Street, and here the Crummles's lived.

Mr. Crummles lived in Saint Thomas's Street, at the house of one Bulph, a pilot, who sported a boat-green door, with window-frames of the same colour, and had the little finger of a drowned man on his parlour mantel-shelf, with other maritime and natural curiosities. He displayed also a brass knocker, a brass plate, and a brass bell-handle, all very bright and shining; and had a mast, with a vane on the top of it, in his back yard.

Miss Snellicci had lodgings in Lombard Street, which runs at right angles to St. Thomas's Street.

At the stipulated hour next morning, Nicholas repaired to the lodgings of Miss Snellicci, which were in a place called Lombard Street, at the house of a tailor. A strong smell of ironing pervaded the little passage; and the tailor's daughter, who opened the door, appeared in that flutter of spirits which is so often attendant upon the periodical getting up of a family's linen.

The only other references to Portsmouth in Dickens's works are brief; a mere passing mention in *The Uncommercial Traveller*, and a record in *Great Expectations* of the fact that the returned convict Magwitch landed in Portsmouth under the name of Provis.

In October, 1860, Dickens was in Portsmouth, to see his son Sydney, dubbed "The Admiral," safely in his new quarters on board the "Britannia." He had just passed as a Naval Cadet, and was, so Dickens described him, "all eyes and gold lace."

Writing at the time Dickens said:

Every maritime person in the town knew him. He seemed to know every boy on board the "Britannia," and was a tremendous favourite evidently. It was very characteristic of him that they good naturedly helped him, he being so small, into his hammock at night. But he couldn't rest in it on these terms, and got out again to learn the right way of getting in independently. Official report states that 'after a few spills, he succeeded perfectly, and went to sleep.'

v

Three years previously Dickens had seen another son off aboard from the neighbouring port of Southampton. This was Walter, and in a letter to Edmund Yates on the 19th July he tenderly expresses his grief at parting with his sons.

The Walter of fiction, in *Dombey and Son*, also went to sea, and the loss of the "Son and Heir" in which he sailed was first heard of in Southampton, by the report of the Barque "Defiance" at that port.

Southampton is mentioned in *Nicholas Nickleby* by Mr. Folair, who knew for certain of "fifteen and sixpence that came to Southampton one night last month to see me dance the Highland Fling."

Dickens gave two Readings at the Royal Victoria Rooms, Portland Terrace, Southampton, on the 9th and 10th November, 1858. He stayed at the Royal Hotel.

Winchester is mentioned once or twice in *Nicholas Nickleby*. In the first place, Nicholas's attention is drawn to it in connection with a press paragraph displayed in the lodgings of Miss Snellicci at Portsmouth, which stated that that lady had sprained her ankle "by slipping on a piece of orange-peel flung by a monster in human form . . . upon the stage at Winchester; and it was to this town that Mr. Vincent Crummles and his company were to proceed after Nicholas left them.

Richard Carstone, in *Bleak House*, was educated at Winchester School.

CHAPTER THREE

A SEASIDE TOUR

I

DICKENS, in common with all novelists, had one advantage of his profession which is not shared by others: it did not matter, within reason, where his work was done. Dickens was admittedly of a restless disposition and loved change: but to his favourite haunts he was pretty constant, and so we find his English summer holidays were for the most part taken at Broadstairs; but when other places claimed him for a time it was always on the South coast, and never farther West than the Isle of Wight.

Broadstairs is easily reached by road or rail from Canterbury, nineteen miles away. In our first chapter we have covered the ground of the Dover Road through Canterbury; and Dover can be equally well reached by way of the seaside route we are now taking. The little town of Broadstairs owes much to Dickens, who may well be said to have discovered it, and the house that stands on a projection of land overlooking the harbour, is known far and wide as Bleak House, and as the house that Dickens occupied. However, the Dickens interest is by no means confined to this one house where he stayed for only two out of the dozen or more summers spent at Broadstairs.

A very apt description of the place was given by Dickens in a letter to his American friend Felton:

This is a little fishing-place; intensely quiet; built on a cliff, whereon—in the centre of a tiny semi-circular bay—our house stands; the sea rolling and dashing under the windows. Seven miles out are the Goodwin Sands (you've heard of the Goodwin Sands?) whence floating lights perpetually wink after dark, as if they were carrying on intrigues with the servants. Also there is a big lighthouse called the North Foreland on a hill behind the

village, a severe parsonic light, which reproves the young and giddy floaters, and stares grimly out upon the sea. Under the cliff are rare good sands, where all the children assemble every morning and throw up impossible fortifications, which the sea throws down again at high water. Old gentlemen and ancient ladies flirt after their own manner in two reading-rooms and on a great many scattered seats in the open air. Other old gentlemen look all day through telescopes and never see anything. In a bay-window in a one-pair sits, from nine o'clock to one, a gentleman with rather long hair and no neckcloth, who writes and grins as if he thought he were very funny indeed. His name is Boz. At one he disappears, and presently emerges from a bathing machine, and may be seen—a kind of salmon-coloured porpoise—splashing about in the ocean. After that he may be seen in another bay-window on the ground floor, eating a strong lunch; after that, walking a dozen miles or so, or lying on his back in the sand reading a book.

It was in the autumn of 1837 that Dickens and his wife went for their first seaside holiday to Broadstairs, which was then quite a retired spot and nothing approaching the importance it has since achieved. They stayed at No. 12 (now No. 31) High Street, and here a part of *The Pickwick Papers* was written, as stated by a tablet on the wall. From this date until 1851 he was a regular summer visitor to the town: only two summers, 1844 and 1846, was he missing, and in nearly all cases his visits extended into several weeks.

For four years rooms at No. 40 Albion Street were taken; this was, later on, incorporated with the Albion Hotel, where Dickens also stayed in 1845, 1849 and 1859—as a tablet bears witness. Here a part of *Nicholas Nickleby* was written. Lawn House was rented in 1840-1 while writing *The Old Curiosity Shop* and *Barnaby Rudge*.

In 1847 and in 1848 he stayed in Chandos Place. It was during the visit of 1847 that he first began to complain of the great noise in the streets, which rendered writing rather difficult. To Forster he wrote:

Vagrant music is getting to that height here, and is so impossible to be escaped from, that I fear Broadstairs and I must part company in time to come. Unless it pours of rain I cannot write half-an-hour without the most excruciating organs, fiddles, bells, or glee-singers. There is a violin of the most torturing kind under the window now

The England of Dickens

(time, ten in the morning) and an Italian box of music on the steps—both in full blast.

However, in spite of this the charm of Broadstairs still continued to hold him. In 1848 he spent "an idle summer" there, with only *The Haunted Man* to finish.

The following year (1849) Dickens was in the throes of *David Copperfield*: he was unsettled as to summer holidays and sought a change from Broadstairs, and a visit to the Isle of Wight was arranged: but he found the air too relaxing; his daughter Maimie was taken ill, so in the September the family returned to their old favourite Broadstairs. As soon as he was in Broadstairs, he became more settled in his mind about the book and decided to put a great part of the MS. of his own life, on which he had been busy some time previously, into Number 4 of the story; this was Chapter Eleven, which is mostly autobiographical.

The location of Betsey Trotwood at Dover was purely imaginary, as the original was Mary Strong, who lived in the house in Nuckell's Place, Broadstairs, now called Dickens House and marked with a tablet to the effect that in the house "lived the original of Betsey Trotwood in *David Copperfield* by Charles Dickens, 1849."

The gardens in front of the house facing the sea were meadow-land in those days, and Miss Strong, it is said, had as decided an antipathy to donkeys as Miss Betsey.

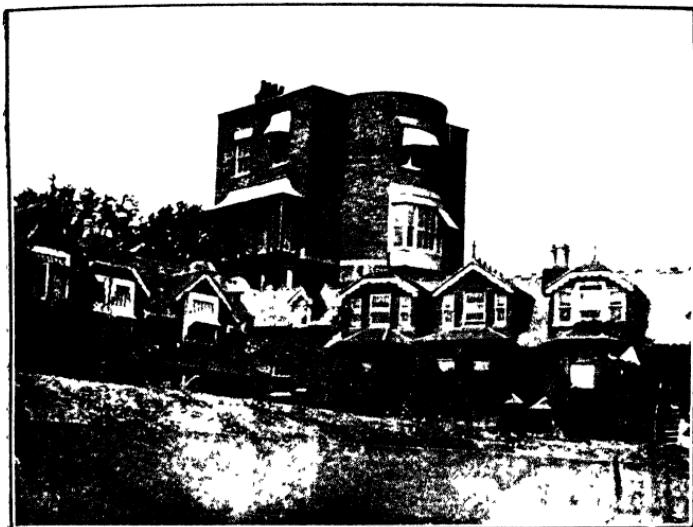
In July, 1850, Dickens was at last able to secure Fort House from the July for a few months, and here *David Copperfield* was completed.

The house has undergone several alterations since then, including the altogether unnecessary change of name to Bleak House—a tribute to Dickens, no doubt; but it was not the Bleak House of the story, nor was any portion of *Bleak House* planned or written there.

On an outer wall of the house is a granite tablet bearing a bronze bust of Dickens, encircled by a wreath bound with ribbons upon which are inscribed the names of some of the works. It is a pity that *Barnaby Rudge* and *The Old Curiosity Shop*, both partly written at Broadstairs, should be omitted, and *Bleak House* and other works having no association with the place included..

He took a fond farewell of Broadstairs in a paper in *Household Words* for 2nd August, 1851, entitled "Our Watering Place":

Half awake and half asleep, this idle morning in our sunny window on the edge of a chalk-cliff in the old-



FORT HOUSE, BROADSTAIRS



CHICHESTER HOUSE, BRIGHTON

Photos by Walter Dexter

fashioned watering-place to which we are a faithful resorter, we feel a lazy inclination to sketch its picture.

His last visit was some eight years later; he was far from well at the time, as he wrote to Forster, "I have an instinctive feeling that nothing but the sea will restore me." His friend, Wilkie Collins, and his brother, were at Broadstairs at the time, and to them he wrote, "Nothing but sea air and sea water will set me right. I want to come to Broadstairs next Wednesday by the mid-day train and stay till Monday." Accordingly, Broadstairs welcomed him once again, and again he stayed at the Albion Hotel, from which place he wrote a very characteristic letter to his two daughters.

II

Herne Bay was also known to Dickens, but of all the Kentish seaside towns, Broadstairs had the preference.

In a letter to Douglas Jerrold, written on a cold, wet day in June, 1843, he dismisses the proposal of a visit there, rather curtly:

Herne Bay. Hum. I suppose it's no worse than any other place in this weather, but it is watery rather—isn't it? In my mind's eye, I have the sea in a perpetual state of smallpox; and the chalk running downhill like town milk.

Later, however, his opinion of the place undoubtedly improved, as in 1851 he wrote to Charles Knight from Broadstairs holding out an "expedition to Herne Bay, Canterbury, where not?" as an inducement to him to spend a few days there.

The larger watering-places of Thanet, Ramsgate and Margate had little charm for Dickens; he preferred the quietude offered him by Broadstairs, the situation of which, midway between the two towns, enabled him to visit either during an afternoon walk.

In *Bleak House* reference is made to the popularity of the Thanet towns for seaside holidays:

It is the hottest long vacation known for many years. All the young clerks are madly in love, and, according to their various degrees, pine for bliss with the beloved object at Margate, Ramsgate or Gravesend.

The journey from London to the Thanet towns was usually made by water from London Bridge, and this was the way Dickens most often came; and he gives descriptions of the

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incidents of such journeys in "The Tuggses at Ramsgate," "The River" and "The Steam Excursion"; all in *Sketches by Boz*.

In 1842 Dickens wrote to Forster from Broadstairs:

Strange as it may appear to you the sea is running so high that we have no choice but to return by land. No steamer can come out of Ramsgate, and the Margate boat lay out all night on Wednesday with all her passengers on board. You may be sure of us therefore on Saturday at 5, for I have determined to leave here to-morrow, as we could not otherwise manage it in time; and have engaged an omnibus to bring the whole caravan by the overland route. . . . We cannot open a window, or a door; legs are of no use on the terrace; and the Margate boats can only take people aboard at Herne Bay!

Margate comes in for a fair amount of mention in the *Sketches by Boz*, although no one special story is devoted to it, as was the case with Ramsgate. Mrs. Tuggs simply sneered at Margate when it was suggested for the family holiday: "Margate? . . . Worse and worse—nobody there but tradespeople" she said.

Ramsgate was visited by Dickens during his first visit to Broadstairs in 1837. Thus he wrote to Forster:

I have walked upon the sands at low-water from this place to Ramsgate, and sat upon the same at high-ditto till I have been flayed with the cold.

But we cannot find he ever paid more than fleeting visits to the town. In 1845 he wrote to Forster:

I went to a circus at Ramsgate on Saturday night, where Mazeppa was played in three long acts without an H in it; as if for a wager.

There are, however, sundry references to Ramsgate in the novels—more particularly in the *Sketches by Boz*, and from the knowledge displayed of Ramsgate and Pegwell Bay in "The Tuggses at Ramsgate," published in 1836: it is probable that Dickens had visited the town prior to his stay in Broadstairs in 1837.

This story gives an amusing account of the holiday spent at Ramsgate by the Tuggs family to celebrate their inheritance of twenty thousand pounds. Where shall they go; Gravesend was low, Margate too full of tradespeople, "Ramsgate? . . . To be sure, how stupid they must have

been not to have thought of that before! Ramsgate was just the place of all others" and then follows an interesting and amusing account of Ramsgate and what befell them there.

III

Deal has associations with *Bleak House*, where Esther Summerson says:

I could only suggest that I should go down to Deal where Richard was then stationed. . . . We all went to London that afternoon and finding two places on the mail, secured them. At our usual bed-time Charley and I were rolling away seaward, with the Kentish letters. . . . At last we came into the narrow streets of Deal and very gloomy they were, upon a raw misty morning. The long flat beach with its little irregular houses, wooden and brick and its litter of capstans, and great boats and sheds, and bare upright poles with tackle and blocks, and loose gravelly waste places overgrown with grass and weeds, were as dull in appearance as any place I ever saw. The sea was heaving under a thick white fog; and nothing else was moving but a few early ropemakers, who with the yarn twisted round their bodies, looked as if, tired of their present state of existence, they were spinning themselves into cordage.

But when we got into a warm room in an excellent hotel . . . Deal began to look more cheerful. Our little room was like a ship's cabin, and that delighted Charley very much.

It was while walking on the beach at Deal that Esther witnessed a small boat landing from a "great Indiaman" and recognised among the officers Allan Woodcourt, returned from the East, with whom she later had an interview at the hotel.

Deal was probably the town mentioned in "Out of the Season," to which he walked from "the watering-place out of the season" (Folkestone).

A walk of ten miles brought me to a seaside town without a cliff, which, like the town I had come from, was out of the season too. Half of the houses were shut up; half of the other half were to let; the town might have done as much business as it was doing then, if it had been at the bottom of the sea. Nobody seemed to flourish save the attorney. . . .

The parlor bell in the Admiral Benbow had grown so flat with being out of the season, that neither could I hear it ring when I pulled the handle for lunch, nor could the young woman in black stockings and strong shoes, who acted as waiter out of the season, until it had been tinkled three times.

Admiral Benbow's cheese was out of the season, but his home-made bread was good, and his beer was perfect.

To Dover, Dickens was also a fairly frequent visitor, and we have dealt with his visits to that town on pages 19-21.

IV

Although it was not until 1855 that Dickens spent a seaside holiday at Folkestone, the place was well known to him before, and had often been visited during his holidays at Broadstairs.

On 13th July, 1849, we find him writing a characteristic letter from Broadstairs:

Why sir, I'm going to Folkestone on Saturday sir, not on accounts of the manifacktring of Bengal cheroots as there is there, but for the survay in 'o' the coast sir. . . . You couldn't spend your arternoon better sir. Dover, Sandgate, Herne Bay—they're all to be wisited sir.

"There are two ways of going to Folkestone," he wrote to Mary Boyle from Dover in 1852, "both lovely and striking in the highest degree, and there are heights and downs and country roads, and I don't know what, everywhere."

In the summer of 1855 Dickens and his family took residence at No. 3 Albion Villas, Folkestone, and it was during his stay there that he decided to give a public reading from his works to assist the funds of the local institutes; this led to the idea of giving such readings for his own benefit, the first series of which was given three years later.

Thus we find him writing to Förster from Folkestone on the 16th September, 1855: "I am going to read for them here on the 5th of next month, and have answered in the last fortnight thirty applications to do the like all over England, Ireland and Scotland." And a week later:

I am going to read here next Friday week. There are (as there are everywhere) a Literary Institution and a Working Men's Institution, which have not the slightest sympathy or connection. The stalls are five shillings, and

I have made them fix the working men's admission at three pence, and I hope it may bring them together. The event comes off in a carpenter's shop, as the biggest place that can be got.

The "carpenter's shop" was a builder's saw-mills in the Dover Road, on the site now occupied by the Fire Station.

We cannot glean very much of Dickens's life at Folkestone from the published letters, as very few have reference to it.

The only references of importance to Folkestone in the works are to be found in *Reprinted Pieces*. The following extract is from "A Flight," describing the journey by train from London to Folkestone to connect with the steamer for Boulogne. The paper originally appeared in *Household Words*, 30th August, 1851.

Now fresher air, now glimpses of unenclosed Downland with flapping crows flying over it . . . now the sea, now Folkestone. . . . We are dropped slowly down to the Port, and sidle to and fro (the whole Train) before the insensible Royal George Hotel for some ten minutes. The Royal George takes no more heed of us than its namesake under water at Spithead, or under earth at Windsor, does. The Royal George dog lies winking and blinking at us, without taking the trouble to sit up; and the Royal George's "wedding party" at the open window (who seem, I must say, rather tired of bliss) don't bestow a solitary glance upon us. . . . The first gentleman in Folkestone is evidently used up, on this subject.

There is no Royal George Hotel at Folkestone. Some years later, in writing *A Tale of Two Cities*, Dickens calls the Ship Hotel at Dover the Royal George.

To *Household Words* of 29th September, 1855, Dickens contributed an article on Folkestone under the title of "Out of Town." In it he called the place Pavilionstone. This was subsequently published in *Reprinted Pieces*.

Sitting, on a bright September morning, among my books and papers at my open window on the cliff overhanging the sea-beach, I have the sky and ocean framed before me like a beautiful picture. . . . The name of the little town, on whose shore this sea is murmuring . . . is Pavilionstone. Within a quarter of a century, it was a little fishing town, and they do say, that the time was, when it was a little smuggling town.

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The article also contained an eulogy of the Pavilion Hotel.

The following year Dickens wrote another sea-side article, "Out of the Season," already referred to. Folkestone was probably the "watering-place out of the season" that he had in his mind, although no mention is made of it by name.

For a complete account of *The Kent of Dickens*, by the present writer, the reader is referred to a volume bearing that title, published by the same publisher as this book, price 6/- nett.

V

Dickens paid only one visit to Hastings on his reading tours, and except that he has left a record that he "turned away half Hastings" and that the effect of the readings there "really seems to have outdone the best usual impression," we have no further account of the place from his pen, nor do we know if he ever visited it on any other occasion. The date of the reading was 6th November, 1861.

Eastbourne was visited in 1860. Forster was staying there in the October and to him Dickens wrote: "It would be a great pleasure to me to come to you, an immense pleasure, and to sniff the sea I love (from the shore); but I fear I must come down one morning and go back at night." He then goes on to tell why; that he has his new story, *Great Expectations* in hand. "Therefore what I hoped would be a few days at Eastbourne diminish to a few hours."

VI

Dickens's personal connection with Brighton as a seaside holiday resort was from 1837 until about 1853, during which period he was a regular visitor.

So far as can be ascertained, his first visit was in October, 1837, when after finishing *The Pickwick Papers* and during the writing of *Oliver Twist*, he spent about ten days there at the Old Ship Hotel, where he had "a beautiful bay-windowed sitting-room, fronting the sea."

On the 3rd of November he wrote to Forster regretting that he had not come down to keep him company :

I have seen nothing of B.'s brother who was to have shown me the lions, and my notions of the place are consequently somewhat confined: being limited to the pavilion, the chain-pier, and the sea. The last is quite enough for me, and, unless I am joined by some male

companion (do you think I shall be?) is most probably all I shall make acquaintance with.

In the same letter he humorously described the weather:

It is a beautiful day and we have been taking advantage of it; but the wind until to-day has been so high, and the weather so stormy, that Kate has been scarcely able to peep out of doors. On Wednesday it blew a perfect hurricane, breaking windows, knocking down shutters, carrying people off their legs, blowing the fires out, and causing universal consternation. The air was for some hours darkened with a shower of black hats (second hand) which are supposed to have been blown off the heads of unwary passengers in remote parts of the town, and have been industriously picked up by the fishermen.

and the theatre:

Charles Kean was advertised for "Othello," "for the benefit of Mrs. Sefton, having most kindly postponed for this one day his departure for London." I have not heard whether he got to the theatre, but I am sure nobody else did. They do "The Honeymoon" to-night, on which occasion I mean to patronise the drayma.

and the letter concludes thus characteristically:

I am afraid you will find this letter extremely dear at eightpence, but if the warmest assurances of friendship and attachment, and anxious lookings-forward to the pleasure of your society, be worth anything, throw them into the balance, together with a hundred good wishes and one hearty assurance that I am, &c., &c., Charles Dickens. No room for the flourish—I'll finish it the next time I write to you.

More than three years elapsed before he again visited Brighton, when we find him writing from the Old Ship Hotel to George Cattermole, who was at the time illustrating *The Old Curiosity Shop*.

I passed your house on Wednesday, being then atop of the Brighton Era, but there was nobody at the door, saving a solitary poultreter, and all my warm-hearted aspirations lodged in the goods he was delivering. No doubt you observed a peculiar *reksh* in your dinner. That was the cause.

The next mention of Brighton is in a letter to Forster in October, 1845, when finishing *The Cricket on the Hearth*. "Visions of Brighton come upon me, and I have a great mind to go there and finish my second part."

The railway to Brighton was opened in 1841, and it is very probable that Dickens paid several flying visits to the town between 1841 and 1847, the date of his next recorded visit, when he stayed with Mrs. Dickens, his eldest boy and Miss Hogarth at 148 King's Road, next door to the Norfolk Hotel. He fetched his two little daughters down to join them during the last week of their stay. He was still at work writing *Dombey* at the time, although his letters do not allude to it, and the Brighton scenes in that novel were all written before that time. It is therefore reasonable to suppose that Brighton saw him more frequently between the years above mentioned, although there is no record of the fact.

His next visit to Brighton was in March, 1848, this time with his wife and Mrs. Macready. They stayed first at the Bedford Hotel (where he had made Mr. Dombey and Mr. Toots put up), and then at Junction House, No. 1 Junction Road, close to the Old Steine. Macready joined them on the Sundays during their stay, and to him Dickens wrote "we have migrated from the Bedford, and come here, where we are very comfortably (not to say gorgeously) accommodated."

In the November of the same year he was again at Brighton, staying at the Bedford Hotel, and his letters contain some references to the theatre.

I have been at work all day, and am going to wander into the theatre, where (for the comic man's benefit) 'two gentlemen of Brighton' are performing two counts in a melodrama. I was quite addle headed for the time being and think an amateur or two would revive me.

In the same letter we read: "The Duke of Cambridge is staying in this house, and they are driving me mad by having Life Guard Bands under our windows playing *our* overtures. . . ."

The next day he wrote Mark Lemon an account of his visit to the theatre:

I went to the play last night—fifth act of Richard the Third. Richmond by a stout *lady*, with a particularly well-developed bust, who finished all the speeches with the soubrette simper. Also, at the end of the tragedy she

came forward (still being Richmond) and said, "Ladies and gentlemen, on Wednesday next the entertainments will be for *My* benefit, when I hope to meet your approbation and support." Then, having bowed herself into the stage-door, she looked out of it, and said, winningly, "Won't you come?" which was enormously applauded.

In the February of the following year (1849) Dickens and his wife were again at Brighton, this time accompanied by the Leeches, and here they met with an amazing adventure. They had taken lodgings (the address is not given) and after they had been residing there for a week both the landlord and his daughter went mad, and the lodgers were forced to seek accommodation at the Bedford Hotel.

If you could have heard the cursing and crying of the two; could have seen the physician and nurse quoited out into the passage by the madman at the hazard of their lives; could have seen Leech and me flying to the doctor's rescue; could have seen our wives pulling us back; could have seen the M.D. faint with fear; could have seen three other M.D.'s come to his aid; with an atmosphere of Mrs. Gamps, strait-waistcoats, struggling friends and servants, surrounding the whole; you would have said it was quite worthy of me, and quite in keeping with my usual proceedings.

At this time Dickens was engaged on thinking out the title for his new story, and the matter gave him much concern; in the same letter he wrote: "A sea-fog to-day, but yesterday inexpressibly delicious. My mind running, like a high sea, no names—not satisfied yet, though." And it was not until he had left Brighton for Broadstairs that he finally decided on the title of the book we now familiarly know as *David Copperfield*. It was on this visit that he wrote an invitation in rhyme to Mark Lemon, to join him; the refrain was as follows:

Oh, my Lemon, round and fat,
Oh, my bright, my right, my tight 'un,
Think a little what you're at—
Don't stay at home, but come to Brighton.

The following year, 1850, he was again at No. 148 King's Road for a short time, and probably a part of *David Copperfield* was written here, but of this we cannot say for certain. However, "The Child's Dream of a Star" was written here on this occasion. Forster quotes a letter from Brighton dated

14th March, 1850, which shows the connection this charming little paper has with Brighton. *Household Words* had just commenced publication:

Looking over the suggested contents of number two at breakfast this morning, I felt an uneasy sense of there being a want of something tender, which would apply to some universal household knowledge. Coming down in the railroad the other night (always a wonderfully suggestive place to me when I am alone) I was looking at the stars, and revolving a little idea about them. Putting now these two things together, I wrote the enclosed little paper, straightway; and should like you to read it before you send it to the printers (it will not take you five minutes), and let me have a proof by return.

Three years elapsed before he returned to Brighton, and then he took up lodgings again at Junction House; but not for long. He seemed to tire of the place as he did of others; perhaps it was not sufficiently restful for his overworked system.

Some years before, in a letter to Frank Stone, he had already expressed himself in these terms:

I don't in the abstract approve of Brighton. I couldn't pass an autumn here; but it is a gay place for a week or so; and when one laughs and cries, and suffers the agitation that some men experience over their books, it's a bright change to look out of window, and see the gilt little toys on horseback going up and down before the mighty sea, and thinking nothing of it.

However, he made at least two further visits to Brighton apart from his public readings there.

Writing to Collins on the 14th February, 1857, Dickens said: "We will then discuss the Brighton and other trip possibilities," and arrangements were actually made to go to Brighton, as the following letter of the 4th March shows:

Ellis (proprietor of the Bedford Hotel, Brighton) responds to my letter that rooms shall be ready. There is a train at 12 which appears to me to be the train for the distinguished visitors.

In October, 1860, Forster was staying there for his health and Dickens paid him a short visit, about which he wrote to Wilkie Collins on October 24th, 1860:

I have been down to Brighton to see Forster . . . I walked six hours and a half on the Downs yesterday and never stopped or sat.

Dickens's first visit to Brighton on his reading tours was on the 12th and 13th November, 1858, when he ended his first tour there, and had Wilkie Collins for a companion at the Bedford Hotel, to whom he wrote: "Think of our finding ready taken here, one thousand stalls!" This was at the Town Hall.

In 1861, on November 7th and 8th, he again gave readings in the Town Hall, and on the 9th in the Royal Pavilion, on which latter day he wrote to Forster:

Last night (Brighton) I had a most charming audience for *Copperfield* with a delicacy of perception that really made the work delightful. It is very pretty to see the girls and women generally, in the matter of Dora; and everywhere I have found that peculiar personal relation between my audience and myself on which I counted most when I entered on this enterprise.

His last appearances in Brighton were in 1868, when he read at the Grand Concert Hall (now Sherry's Dancing Hall), near the bottom of West Street, on October 19th and 22nd, November 2nd and 7th, and on each occasion he stayed at the Bedford Hotel.

The influence of Brighton on Dickens is reflected to a small degree in several of his books, although it is of course in connection with *Dombey and Son* that it has its most vivid recollections.

In the story of "The Tuggses at Ramsgate" in the *Sketches by Boz*, Brighton is suggested as the place for holiday in celebration of the family's sudden access to wealth:

Brighton? Mr. Cymon Tuggs opposed an insurmountable objection. All the coaches had been upset in turn the last three weeks, and in every case, no blame whatever was attachable to the coachman.

In *Nicholas Nickleby* we are told how Sir Mulberry Hawk escaped to France via Brighton after his duel with Lord Frederick Verisopht, and Mr. Turveydrop in *Bleak House* informed Esther on first meeting her, that:

His Royal Highness the Prince Regent did me the honour to inquire, on my removing my hat as he drove out of the Pavilion at Brighton (that fine building),

"Who is he? Who the Devil is he? Why don't I know him?"

When Mrs. Chick proposed sea air as the only thing to literally put little Paul Dombey on his feet, she suggested Brighton and Mrs. Pipchin in almost the same breath; and so to the "infantine boarding house of a very select description" Paul was sent to be under the supervision of Mrs. Pipchin, "a marvellous, ill-favoured, ill-conditioned old lady, of a stooping figure, with a mottled face, like bad marble, a hook nose, and a hard grey eye, that looked as if it might have been hammered at on an anvil without sustaining any injury. . . . She was generally spoken of as "a great manager" of children, and the secret of her management was, to give them everything that they didn't like, and nothing that they did—which was found to sweeten their dispositions very much."

It is rather difficult, and perhaps futile, to attempt to identify any house in Brighton, as the original of what Dickens calls "The castle of the ogress." All we know is that it was in a "steep by-street" so probably Upper or Lower Rock Gardens was the location.

The Castle of this ogress and child-queller was in a steep by-street at Brighton; where the soil was more than usually chalky, flinty, and sterile, and the houses were more than usually brittle and thin; where the small front-gardens had the unaccountable property of producing nothing but marigolds, whatever was sown in them; and where snails were constantly discovered holding on to the street doors, and other public places they were not expected to ornament, with the tenacity of cupping-glasses. In the winter time the air couldn't be got out of the Castle, and in the summer time it couldn't be got in. . . . It was not, naturally, a fresh-smelling house; and in the window of the front parlour, which was never opened, Mrs. Pipchin kept a collection of plants in pots, which imparted an earthy flavour of their own to the establishment. However, choice examples of their kind, too, these plants were of a kind peculiarly adapted to the embowerment of Mrs. Pipchin. There were half-a-dozen specimens of the cactus, writhing round bits of lath, like hairy serpents; another specimen shooting out broad claws, like a green lobster; several creeping vegetables, possessed of sticky and adhesive leaves; and one uncomfortable flower-pot hanging to the ceiling, which appeared to have boiled over,

and tickling people underneath with its long green ends, reminded them of spiders—in which Mrs. Pipchin's dwelling was uncommonly prolific, though perhaps it challenged competition still more proudly, in the season, in point of earwigs.

Mr. Dombey used to come down once a week to see his son and it was on one of these occasions that Major Bagstock put himself in Mr. Dombey's way and got an introduction. "I stay at the Bedford" Mr. Dombey informed him, and in due course the Major had "the honour of calling at the Bedford, Sir," and was invited to dinner. "On Saturday Mr. Dombey came down; and Florence and Paul would go to his hotel, and have tea. They passed the whole of Sunday with him, and generally rode out before dinner."

It was to the Bedford Hotel, on one of the week-end visits, that Captain Cuttle and Walter came to ask for assistance to meet the liabilities of old Sol Gills.

"Brighton proved very beneficial" to young Paul. and the question of his education being discussed, Mrs. Pipchin recommended Mr. Dombey to Dr. Blimber, "my neighbour, Sir. I believe the Doctor's is an excellent establishment."

Dickens describes Dr. Blimber's establishment as "a great hot-house, in which there was a forcing apparatus incessantly at work."

The Doctor's was a mighty fine house, fronting the sea. Not a joyful style of house within, but quite the contrary. Sad-coloured curtains, whose proportions were spare and lean, hid themselves despondently behind the windows. The tables and chairs were put away in rows, like figures in a sum: fires were so rarely lighted in the rooms of ceremony, that they felt like wells, and a visitor represented the bucket; the dining-room seemed the last place in the world where any eating or drinking was likely to occur; there was no sound through all the hours but the ticking of a great clock in the hall, which made itself audible in the very garrets: and sometimes a dull crying of young gentlemen at their lessons, like the murmurings of an assemblage of melancholy pigeons.

Dr. Blimber's is said to have had its prototype in the school kept at Brighton during the years 1839 to 1846 by Dr. Proctor called Chichester House, at the corner of the terrace of that name.

It was in the days before Blimber's that Paul used to be wheeled along the sea front in a little carriage by "a weazen, old, crab-faced man, in a suit of battered oilskin, who had got tough and stringy from long pickling in salt water, and who smelt like a weedy sea-beach when the tide is out," and with Florence always by his side he would sit or lie in his carriage for hours together on the margin of the sea, wondering what it was the sea always said; "The sea, Floy, what is it that it keeps on saying?" and she would tell him "that it was only the noise of the rolling waves."

But Paul Dombey did not die at Brighton; he was taken by coach to London; but he saw the river rushing fast between its green banks. "It's very near the sea. I hear the waves. They always said so."

In a later period of the story when Mrs. Skewton was found to be failing in health, there was a desire to get her to "any place recommended as salutary" and accordingly, we read, "Cleopatra, at one time fretful, at another self complacent, sometimes awake, sometimes asleep, and at all times juvenile, reached Brighton the same night, fell to pieces as usual, and was put away to bed." Carriage drives were ordered her, and on one occasion she walked with the aid of a stick, and Edith, on "a bleak lowering, windy day . . . out upon the Downs with nothing but a bare sweep of land between them and the sky," on which occasion they were again accosted by "Good Mrs. Brown" and her daughter, Alice.

Mrs. Skewton breathed her last at Brighton, and was buried there, Cousin Feenix and Mr. Dombey going down for the funeral.

It was about this same time that Florence paid another visit to Brighton, where she had not been since Paul's death, and whilst sitting on the sea-shore recalling the days when her brother listened to the rolling of the waves, she encountered Toots, "never so surprised in all his life" to see her there, in spite of the fact that he had "followed close on the carriage in which she travelled, every inch of the way from London, loving even to be choked by the dust of the wheels."

Together they went arm in arm to Dr. Blimber's, where Toots created a mighty sensation and even asked Mr. Feeder, B.A. "to come and dine with him at the Bedford."

Afterwards, as Toots and Florence "walked by the sea . . . near to Mr. Dombey's house (Dickens surely meant "Hotel," and the Bedford too! for they were "at the corner of the square") Mr. Toots made one of those famous declarations:

Miss Dombey I really am in that state of adoration of you that I don't know what to do with myself. . . . If it wasn't at the corner of the Square at present, I should go down on my knees, and beg and entreat of you, without any encouragement at all, just to let me hope that I may—may think it possible that you—

Rottingdean near Brighton is referred to in Chapter XI of *Dombey and Son*, as the residence of an Aunt of Miss Pankey (another boarder at Mrs. Pipchin's), from whose house Miss Pankey was usually brought home on Sundays "in deep distress."

VII

It is difficult to say when Dickens first became acquainted with the Isle of Wight, but we know that his introduction to it as a likely place for a summer holiday was due to his friend, the Rev. James White of Bonchurch who, says Forster, writing of 1849 "had made it a place of interest for him during the last few years." It is, therefore, probable that before he took a house there in the summer of 1849, Dickens was quite familiar with the beauties of the island, the real "garden of England." Indeed, we find him writing to White in a letter dated 4th May, 1848:

I see no hope of making a pleasant expedition to the Isle of Wight until about the twentieth. Then I shall hope to do so for one day . . .

My doubts about the house you speak of are twofold . . . I fear Bonchurch is not sufficiently bracing for my chickens, who thrive best in breezy and cold places. This has set me thinking of the Yorkshire coast and sometimes of Dover.

His thoughts turned to it again in the November. In March of that year he had spent a short time in the Salisbury district with Leech, Lemon and Forster, and on November 13th we find him writing to the latter proposing to "repeat the Salisbury Plain idea in a new direction, in mid winter, to wit Blackgang Chine in the Isle of Wight with dark winter cliffs and roaring oceans." But the trip was abandoned—the weather being quite unpropitious, and the friends went to the Cathedral City of Norwich instead.

In 1849 he overcame his objections to the climate of the Island, and desiring a change for the summer from

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Broadstairs, which he had visited for several years, thought of Bonchurch. In the June he went to Shanklin, from which he wrote to his wife on Monday the sixteenth:

I have but a moment. Just got back and post going out. I have taken a most delightful and beautiful house, belonging to White, at Bonchurch; cool, airy, private bathing, everything delicious. I think it is the prettiest place I ever saw in my life, at home or abroad. Anne may begin to dismantle Devonshire Terrace. I have arranged for carriages, luggage, and everything.

The man with the post-bag is swearing in the passage.

P.S. A waterfall in the grounds, which I have arranged with a carpenter to convert into a perpetual shower-bath.

This house was Winterbourne, and he took it for six months, and was busy with *David Copperfield* the whole time. John Leech and his family also had a house at Bonchurch at the same time.

The beauties of this part of the Island attracted him enormously: they were so different from what he had been accustomed to at Broadstairs. Forster declares "he began with an excess of liking" which unfortunately did not endure. This is what he said in a letter of July 28th:

From the top of the highest downs there are views which are only to be equalled on the Genoese shore of the Mediterranean; the variety of walks is extraordinary; things are cheap, and everybody is civil. The waterfall acts wonderfully, and the sea-bathing is delicious. Best of all, the place is certainly cold rather than hot, in the summer-time. The evenings have been even chilly. White very jovial, and emulous of the inimitable in respect of gin-punch. He had made some for our arrival. Ha! ha! not bad for a beginner. . . . I have been, and am, trying to work this morning; but I can't make anything of it, and am going out to think. I am invited by a distinguished friend to dine with you on the first of August, but I have pleaded distance and the being resident in a cave on the seashore; my food, beans; my drink, the water from the rock.

Four days later, showed that he had settled down. "I have just begun to get into work. We are expecting the Queen to come by very soon, in grand array, and are going to let off ever so many guns," add a further letter, dated August 6th, described himself as continuing still at work;

but also taking part in dinners at Blackgang, and picnics of "tremendous success" on Shanklin Down.

The Swinburne family lived at Bonchurch, and Forster tells us "there was a reference in one of his letters, but I have lost it, to a golden-haired lad of the Swinburnes whom his own boys used to play with, since become more widely known."

On Friday we had a grand, and what is better, a very good dinner at "parson" Fielden's, with some choice port. On Tuesday we are going on another picnic; with the materials for a fire, at my express stipulation; and a great iron pot to boil potatoes in. These things, and the eatables, go to the ground in a cart. Last night we had some very good merriment at White's, where pleasant Julian Young and his wife (who are staying about five miles off) showed some droll new games.

This, Forster informs us roused the ambition in Dickens to give a "mighty conjuring performance for all the children in Bonchurch," for which he sent him the necessary materials and which "went off in a tumult of wild delight."

In another letter he wrote:

There has been a Doctor Lankester at Sandown, a very good merry fellow, who has made one at the picnics, and whom I went over and dined with, along with Danby (I remember your liking Danby, and don't wonder at it), Leech, and White.

A letter towards the close of August resumed yet more of his ordinary tone:

We had games and forfeits last night at White's. Davy Roberts's pretty little daughter is there for a week, with her husband, Bicknell's son. There was a dinner first to say good-bye to Danby, who goes to other clergyman's-duty, and we were very merry. Mrs. White unchanging; White comically various in his moods.

Although he was busy with *David Copperfield* every day until 2 o'clock in the afternoon all the time he was at Bonchurch, he found plenty of time for his usual robust exercise of walking. His daily walk was to the top of the downs. "It makes a great difference in the climate to get a blow there, and come down again" he explained. He also had plenty of illustrious visitors around him. His dear friend Talfourd had just been made a Judge, and paid a visit to Bonchurch at this time.

Talfourd comes down next Tuesday, and we think of going over to Ryde on Monday, visiting the play, sleeping there (I don't mean at the play), and bringing the Judge back. Browne is coming down when he has done his month's work. Should you like to go to Alum Bay, while you are here? It would involve a night out, but I think would be very pleasant; and if you think so too, I will arrange it sub-rosa, so that we may not be like Bobadil, "oppressed by numbers." I mean to take a fly over from Shanklin to meet you at Ryde; so that we can walk back from Shanklin over the landslip, where the scenery is wonderfully beautiful. Stone and Egg are coming next month and we hope to see Jerrold before we go.

Work and his allotted pedestrian exercise over, Dickens resorted to games with his usual ardour:

We have been sufficiently rollicking since I finished the number, and have had some great games at rounders every afternoon with all Bonchurch looking on: but I begin to long for a little peace and solitude.

It was during this holiday that we read of a curious happening in connection with an illness to John Leech, the famous *Punch* artist. Writing to Forster on September 23rd, Dickens says:

The sea has been running very high and Leech, while bathing, was knocked over by a bad blow from a great wave on the forehead. He is in bed and had twenty of his namesakes on his temples this morning.

Leech did not get better readily and according to a letter of September 26th to Forster, Dickens put him into a hypnotic sleep.

My plans are all unsettled by Leech's illness; as of course I do not like to leave this place while I can be of any service to him and his good little wife. But all visitors are gone today, and Winterbourne once more left to the engaging family of the inimitable B. Ever since I wrote to you Leech has been seriously worse, and again very heavily bled. The night before last he was in such an alarming state of restlessness, which nothing could relieve, that I proposed to Mrs. Leech to try magnetism. Accordingly in the middle of the night I fell to; and, after a very fatiguing bout of it, put him to sleep for an hour and thirty-five minutes. A change came on in the sleep,

and he is decidedly better. I talked to the astounded little Mrs. Leech across him, when he was asleep, as if he had been a truss of hay. . . . What do you think of my setting up in the magnetic line with a large brass plate? "Terms, twenty-five guineas per nap."

At the end of September he left Bonchurch for his old favourite Broadstairs. The air of this enclosed portion of the island was quite unsuited to his constitution, as he found out after only a few weeks residence there. He was unable to sleep at night, and complained that he felt depressed all the time.

Of all the places I ever have been in, I have never been in one so difficult to exist in, pleasantly. Naples is hot and dirty, New York feverish, Washington bilious, Genoa exciting, Paris rainy—but Bonchurch, smashing. I am quite convinced that I should die here, in a year. It's not hot, it's not close, I don't know what it is, but the prostration of it is awful. Nobody here has the least idea what I think of it; but I find from all sorts of hints from Kate, Georgina, and the Leeches, that they are all affected more or less in the same way, and find it very difficult to make head against. I make no sign, and pretend not to know what is going on. But they are right. I believe the Leeches will go soon, and small blame to 'em! For me, when I leave here at the end of this September, I must go down to some cold place; as Ramsgate for example, for a week or two; or I seriously believe I shall feel the effects of it for a long time.

In those days the Undercliff was recommended for consumptives, but Dickens was one of the early discoverers that an enervating climate is of little use as a cure for this disease.

The longer I live, the more I doubt the doctors. I am perfectly convinced, that, for people suffering under a wasting disease, this Undercliff is madness altogether. The doctors, with the old miserable folly of looking at one bit of a subject, take the patient's lungs and the Undercliff's air, and settle solemnly that they are fit for each other. But the whole influence of the place, never taken into consideration, is to reduce and overpower vitality. I am quite confident that I should go down under it, as if it were so much lead, slowly crushing me.

There are only a few references to the Isle of Wight in Dickens's books. In *Nicholas Nickleby* we hear of the Vincent Crummles Company paying a week's visit to the theatre at Ryde, after Nicholas had left them; and also in the same book we read that Mr. Lillywick and his bride, Miss Petoker, "departed for Ryde where they were to spend the next two days in profound retirement": accompanied by the Infant Phenomenon, the "travelling bridesmaid" specially chosen because the steamboat people, deceived by her size, would carry her at half price.

The Isle of Wight has always been famous for honeymoons: small wonder is it therefore that Dickens on another occasion, should take a newly married couple there. This was in *Our Mutual Friend*, when the Lammles spent their honeymoon at Shanklin—where they both found each other out as a couple of impostors! The time comes in "about a fortnight, and it comes to Mr. and Mrs. Lammle on the sands at Shanklin, in the Isle of Wight."

Mr. and Mrs. Lammle have walked for some time on the Shanklin sands, and one may see by their footprints that they have not walked arm in arm, and that they have not walked in a straight track, and that they have walked in a moody humour; for, the lady has prodded little spirting holes in the damp sand before her with her parasol, and the gentleman has trailed his stick after him. As if he were of the Mephistopheles family indeed, and had walked with a drooping tail.

CHAPTER FOUR

ROAD AND RIVER WITH OUR MUTUAL FRIEND

I

WHEN one come to reckon up the number of times the River Thames and its towns and villages form the scene of adventures of the characters in the writings of Dickens, one is surprised at the quantity of material to be dealt with.

Much of it, however, treats of the London portion of the river, and has already been covered by the present writer in "The London of Dickens." To that book the reader is referred, and with it he can recall the exploits of Pip in *Great Expectations* between Temple Stairs and Gravesend in his endeavours to get his benefactor Magwitch safely out of the country; can see in fancy the boat of Gaffer Hexam plying its nefarious trade "between Southwark Bridge which is of iron, and London Bridge which is of stone": can follow Arthur Clennam by way of Fulham and Putney to the cottage of the Meagles family at the river-side at Twickenham: can visit Chelsea, the birthplace of Vincent Crummles, and residence of Mr. Bayham Badger and Miss Sophia Wackles: can visit Sir Barnet Skittles at Fulham and Dora at Putney: the Pocket family and Clara Barley at Hammersmith: Betty Higden at Brentford, and Estella and Mr. Tupman at Richmond.

Our present pilgrimage follows the road and the river from London to Oxford, and we cannot do better than to start it in company with Oliver Twist and Bill Sikes en route for the burglary at Chertsey, picking up Rogue Riderhood on his way to the Lock where he was Deputy Lock-keeper and later accompanying Betty Higden in her brave flight from the terrors of pauperism.

In Chapter XXI of *Oliver Twist*, Dickens is so precise in his description of the road to be followed, that he might very well have been writing a guide book. Our only hope

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is that the elements will be kinder to us on our journey than they were at the starting of The Expedition, for the chapter which has this heading commences with the observation that "It was a cheerless morning when they got into the street: blowing and raining hard: and the clouds looking dull and stormy." From the Bethnal Green Road, Oliver and Bill Sikes went forth:

Turning down Sun Street and Crown Street, and crossing Finsbury Square, Mr. Sikes struck, by way of Chiswell Street, into Barbican; thence into Long Lane, and so into Smithfield; from which latter place arose a tumult of discordant sounds that filled Oliver Twist with amazement. . . . Mr. Sikes dragging Oliver after him . . . made their way through Hosier Lane into Holborn. "Now young un" said Sikes, looking up at the clock of St. Andrew's Church "hard upon seven you must step out."

They passed along Holborn, into Oxford Street and so to Hyde Park Corner, where we are reminded two other personages walked and talked about the River. These were Bradley Headstone and Rogue Riderhood.

In *Our Mutual Friend*, Book 3, Chapter II, Rogue Riderhood explains to Bradley Headstone his visit to Eugene Wrayburn's chambers:

"I'm walking back to my lock . . . the Temple laid upon my line of road . . ." They had walked along the Strand, and into Pall Mall, and had turned up hill towards Hyde Park Corner, Bradley Headstone waiting on the pace and lead of Riderhood and leaving him to indicate the course . . .

"Where is your lock?"

"Twenty mile and odd—call it five and twenty mile and odd if you like—up stream."

"How is it called?"

"Plashwater Weir Mill Lock."

We shall see that the original of Plashwater Weir Mill Lock was at Hurley about 32 miles from London: but meantime it was somewhere between Hyde Park Corner and Hammersmith that the passing of five shillings from Bradley Headstone to Rogue Riderhood sealed an understanding between them in respect to Eugene Wrayburn and Lizzie Hexam, and a promise of Headstone, afterwards redeemed, to pay Riderhood a visit at the Lock. They were at the

point where the country then began, and Headstone had to turn back for his duties at the school, when Riderhood remarked: "No luck never come yet of a dry acquaintance. Let's wet it with a mouthful of rum and milk, T'otherest Governor." Bradley assenting, went with him into an early public house haunted by unsavoury smells of musty hay and stale straw.

From here Riderhood got a lift on his way, "elevated on a high heap of baskets on a waggon" and Bradley turned to retrace his steps and "by and by struck off through little traversed ways" to his school.

II

Resuming the Chertsey expedition of Bill Sikes and Oliver Twist:

They held their course . . . until they passed Hyde Park Corner and were on their way to Kensington: when Sikes relaxed his pace, until an empty cart . . . came up. Seeing "Hounslow" written on it, he asked the driver with as much civility as he could assume, if he would give them a lift as far as Isleworth.

The request was granted, and

As they passed the different mile-stones, Oliver wondered, more and more, where his companion meant to take him. Kensington, Hammersmith, Chiswick, Kew Bridge, Brentford, were all passed; and yet they went on as steadily as if they had only just begun their journey. At length, they came to a public-house called the Coach and Horses: a little way beyond which, another road appeared to turn off. And here, the cart stopped. Sikes dismounted with great precipitation, holding Oliver by the hand all the while.

The Coach and Horses, by no means a picturesque inn, is still to be seen on the left of the road after passing through Brentford, and just before reaching the lodge gates of Syon House, surmounted with the Lion taken from Northumberland House at Charing Cross on its demolition. The Lion on Northumberland House was well-known to Dickens as a boy, and is referred to in *Gone Astray*.

A little way beyond, the road turns to the left, as described, and leads through Isleworth to Twickenham.

They turned round to the left, a short way past the public-house; and then, taking a right-hand road, walked on for a long time: passing many large gardens and gentlemen's houses on both sides of the way, and stopping for nothing but a little beer, until they reached a town. Here against the wall of a house, Oliver saw written up in pretty large letters, "Hampton." They lingered about, in the fields, for some hours. At length, they came back into the town; and, turning into an old public-house with a defaced sign-board, ordered some dinner by the kitchen fire.

The kitchen was an old, low-roofed room; with a great beam across the middle of the ceiling, and benches, with high backs to them, by the fire; on which were seated several rough men in smock-frocks, drinking and smoking. They took no notice of Oliver; and very little of Sikes. . . .

They had some cold meat for dinner, and sat so long after it, while Mr. Sikes indulged himself with three or four pipes, that Oliver began to feel quite certain they were not going any further. Being much tired with the walk, and getting up so early, he dozed a little at first; then, quite overpowered by fatigue and the fumes of the tobacco, fell asleep.

The tale of *Oliver Twist* as first published in "Bentley's Miscellany," contained two pieces of description which were omitted in later editions, the first from the first publication in volume form, and the second from a still later edition.

The first lines to be omitted came immediately after the reference to the "gentlemen's houses on both sides of the way," and were:

And at length, crossing a little bridge which led them into Twickenham, from which town they still walked on without stopping for anything but some beer until they reached another town, in which, against the wall, etc.

The second omission, noticeable only in the early volume editions came almost immediately afterwards:

Turning round by a public house which bore the sign of the Red Lion they kept on by the river side for a short distance and then Sikes striking off into a narrow street walked straight to an old public house with a defaced sign-board, etc.

So far as we can find, the location of this public house has not been discovered, but it is very curious that these few

lines should have been the subject of so much revision on two separate occasions. Why the reference to Twickenham was entirely omitted from the first separate edition is a complete mystery, as through that town the couple must have passed. Then came the later deletion of the name of the Red Lion Inn as a guide to the lower class public house where Sikes and Oliver dined, and where the companionable carrier gave them a lift in the direction of Lower Halliford.

The Red Lion at Hampton was probably in Dickens's thoughts when he described one of the adventures of Betty Higden in her brave flight. In *Our Mutual Friend*, Book 3, Chapter VIII, we read:

The poor creature had taken the upward course of the River Thames as her general track. . . . In the pleasant towns of Chertsey, Walton, Kingston and Staines her figure came to be quite well known for some short weeks and then again passed or

In these pleasant little towns on Thames; you may hear the fall of water over the weirs or even, in still weather, the rustle of the rushes and from the bridge you may see the young river, dimpled like a young child, playfully gliding away among the trees, unpolluted by the defilements that lie in wait for it on its course, and as yet out of hearing of the deep summons of the sea.

At one town on the last stages of her wanderings she had a fainting fit, and on coming to, and fearing being taken to the workhouse, she confessed to be quite well again and hurried on:

She looked over her shoulder before turning out of the town and had seen the sign of the White Lion hanging across the road . . . and the old grey church, and the little crowd gazing after her, but not attempting to follow her.

The sign of the Red Lion at Hampton hangs across the road in the manner described.

To Hampton Race Course on the June Meeting, we are introduced in Chapter L of *Nicholas Nickleby*, and the events there lead up to the quarrel between Sir Mulberry Hawk and Lord Francis Verisopht, which had its culmination in the duel in "one of the meadows opposite Twickenham, by the river side."

Near Hampton, Mortimer Lightwood and Eugene Wrayburn had a summer cottage:

They had newly agreed to set up a joint establishment together. They had taken a bachelor cottage near Hampton on the brink of the Thames, and all things fitting were to float with the stream throughout the summer.

Mrs. Gowan, in *Little Dorrit*, "lived in a certain shady and sedate apartments in the Palace at Hampton Court . . . deplored the degeneracy of the times in company with several other old ladies of both sexes."

Henry Gowan, her son, explained that his "mother lived in the most primitive fashion down in that dreary red brick dungeon at Hampton Court," and when he went to visit her in company with Arthur Clennam we are told they found the "venerable inhabitants of that venerable pile . . . encamped there like a sort of civilised gipsies."

III

At the "old public house with a defaced signboard" at Hampton, Sikes fell in with a carrier who was going to Lower Halliford and begged for a lift.

"If you're going directly, I can," replied the man looking out of the pot. "Are you going to Halliford?"

"Going on to Shepperton," replied Sikes.

"I'm your man, as far as I go," replied the other. . . .

The night was very dark. A damp mist rose from the river, and the marshy ground about; and spread itself over the dreary fields. It was piercing cold, too; all was gloomy and black. Not a word was spoken; for the driver had grown sleepy; and Sikes was in no mood to lead him into conversation. Oliver sat huddled together, in a corner of the cart; bewildered with alarm and apprehension; and figuring strange objects in the gaunt trees, whose branches waved grimly to and fro, as if in some fantastic joy at the desolation of the scene.

As they passed Sunbury Church, the clock struck seven. There was a light in the ferry-house window opposite; which streamed across the road, and threw into more sombre shadow a dark yew-tree with graves beneath it. There was a dull sound of falling water not far off; and the leaves of the old tree stirred gently in the night wind. It seemed like quiet music for the repose of the dead.

Sunbury was passed through, and they came again into the lonely road. Two or three miles more, and the cart

stopped. Sikes alighted, took Oliver by the hand, and they once again walked on.

They turned into no house at Shepperton, as the weary boy had expected; but still kept walking on, in mud and darkness through gloomy lanes and over cold open wastes, until they came within sight of the lights of a town at no great distance.

It was, of course, Chertsey that they were approaching, and as they got nearer, we read:

On looking intently forward, Oliver saw that the water was just below them, and that they were coming to the foot of a bridge.

Sikes kept straight on, until they were close upon the bridge; then turned suddenly down a bank upon the left.

“The water!” thought Oliver, turning sick with fear. “He has brought me to this lonely place to murder me!”

He was about to throw himself on the ground, and make one struggle for his young life, when he saw that they stood before a solitary house; all ruinous and decayed. There was a window on each side of the dilapidated entrance; and one story above; but no light was visible. The house was dark, dismantled; and, to all appearance, uninhabited.

Sikes, with Oliver’s hand still in his, softly approached the low porch, and raised the latch. The door yielded to the pressure, and they passed in together.

After meeting Toby Crackit here (there is no record of any such dilapidated house on the river-bank such as Dickens describes), the party proceeded towards the object of their expedition.

They crossed the bridge, and kept on towards the lights which he had seen before. They were at no great distance off; and, as they walked pretty briskly, they soon arrived at Chertsey.

“Slap through the town,” whispered Sikes; “there’ll be nobody in the way, to-night, to see us.”

Toby acquiesced; and they hurried through the main street of the little town, which at that late hour was wholly deserted. A dim light shone at intervals from some bedroom window; and the hoarse barking of dogs occasionally broke the silence of the night. But there was nobody abroad. They had cleared the town, as the church-bell struck two.

Quickening their pace, they turned up a road upon the left hand. After walking about a quarter of a mile, they stopped before a detached house surrounded by a wall; to the top of which, Toby Crackit, scarcely pausing to take breath, climbed in a twinkling.

“The boy next,” said Toby. “Hoist him up; I’ll catch hold of him.”

Before Oliver had time to look round, Sikes had caught him under the arms; and in three or four seconds he and Toby were lying on the grass on the other side. Sikes followed directly.

Why Pyrcroft House in Pyrcroft Street has been associated by many writers as the original of the home of the Maylies at which the famous burglary took place, is more than we can say, but there is the house, the high wall, and indeed everything to fit in with the story, although there is no record to show that Dickens ever visited it.

It is reached through Guildford Street, which turns off to the left of the town in going through it, and in this respect follows the story although it lacks being clear of the town, to make its location certain.

There is no description of Chertsey in *Oliver Twist*, and the identity of “the cottage at some distance in the country” to which Oliver went with the Maylies after his illness, cannot be determined. Here it was that Rose was taken ill and Oliver was sent with a letter to Mr. Losberne the doctor.

It must be carried to the market-town: which is not more than four miles off, by the footpath across the fields: and thence dispatched, by an express on horseback, straight to Chertsey. The people at the inn will undertake to do this; and I can trust to you to see it done, I know. . . .

Swiftly he ran across the fields, and down the little lanes . . . nor did he stop once, save now and then, for a few seconds, to recover breath, until he came, in a great heat, and covered with dust, on the little market-place of the market-town.

Here he paused, and looked about for the inn. There were a white bank, and a red brewery, and a yellow town-hall; and in one corner there was a large house, with all the wood about it painted green: before which was the sign of “The George.” To this he hastened, as soon as it caught his eye.

Mr. Percy Fitzgerald says that this picture of the market-town with its George Inn and red brewery applies to Chertsey, but we venture to think the description is of quite the ordinary variety and applicable to almost any market-town. In any case, Dickens evidently did not wish it to apply to Chertsey.

IV

Dickens was not unacquainted with Windsor, for towards the end of 1841, when recovering from an illness and prior to his departure for America, he spent some little time there. Of this time Forster tells us: "He suffered more than he let anyone perceive, and I was obliged again to keep his room for some days. On the second of November he reported himself as progressing and ordered to Richmond, which, after a week or so, he changed to the White Hart at Windsor, where I passed some days with him and Mrs. Dickens, and her younger sister Georgina."

There are naturally, casual references to Windsor in several of the books, but the principal connection of the town with Dickens, although of minor importance, is to be found in the early part of *Bleak House*, when Esther Summerson opens up her narrative and tell us how her very earliest years were spent there with Mrs. Rachael, until Mr. Kenge came along and she was sent to the school kept by the twin Miss Donnys at Greenleaf, Reading.

This interview took place at Windsor, where I had passed (as far as I know) my whole life. On that day week, amply provided with all necessaries, I left it, inside the stage coach for Reading.

In *Master Humphrey's Clock*, part of which was probably written at Windsor, we read:

A good many years have passed away since old John Podgers lived in the town of Windsor, where he was born, and where, in course of time, he came to be comfortably and snugly buried. You may be sure that in the time of King James the First, Windsor was a very quaint queer old town, and you may take it upon my authority that John Podgers was a very quaint queer old fellow; consequently he and Windsor fitted each other to a nicety, and seldom parted company even for half-a-day.

and the surrounding district, known undoubtedly very well to the novelist, who was a prodigious walker, is referred to

somewhat at length in the Christmas Story, *The Holly Tree Inn* when he moralises on the passing of the old coaching inns, those "monuments of British submission to rapacity and extortion" which are to be met with on the road from Basingstoke and Windsor, through Hounslow to London.

The eldest son of Dickens went to Eton in 1849, and according to a letter written by Dickens to Mrs. Watson in 1852, Dickens went down to Windsor and met his son at the White Hart Hotel, and discussed with him there on the choice of a profession; the army or commerce; and commerce won the day.

Of a previous visit paid to his son at Eton, Dickens wrote to Mrs. Watson in a letter dated July 11th, 1851:

Let me tell you that a week or so ago I took Charley and three of his schoolfellows down the river gipsying. I secured the services of Charley's godfather (an old friend of mine, and a noble fellow with boys) and went down to Slough, accompanied by two immense hampers from Fortnum and Mason, on (I believe) the wettest morning ever seen out of the tropics.

It cleared before we got to Slough; but the boys, who had got up at four (we being due at eleven), had horrible misgivings that we might not come, in consequence of which we saw them looking into the carriages before us, all face. They seemed to have no bodies whatever, but to be all face; their countenances lengthened to the surprising extent. When they saw us, the faces shut up as if they were upon strong springs, and their waistcoats developed themselves in the usual places. When the first hamper came out of the luggage-van, I was conscious of their dancing behind the guard; when the second came out with bottles in it, they all stood wildly on one leg. We then got a couple of flys to drive to the boat-house. I put them in the first, but they couldn't sit still a moment, and were perpetually flying up and down like the toy figures in the sham snuff-boxes. In this order we went on to "Tom Brown's, the tailor's," where they all dressed in aquatic costume, and then to the boat-house, where they all cried in shrill chorus for "Mahogany"—a gentleman, so called by reason of his sunburnt complexion, a waterman by profession. (He was likewise called during the day "Hog" and "Hogany" and seemed to be unconscious of any proper name whatsoever.) We embarked, the sun shining now, in a galley with a striped awning,

which I had ordered for the purpose, and all rowing hard, went down the river. We dined in a field; what I suffered for fear those boys should get drunk, the struggles I underwent in a contest of feeling between hospitality and prudence, must ever remain untold. I feel, even now, old with the anxiety of that tremendous hour. They were very good, however. The speech of one became thick, and his eyes too like lobsters' to be comfortable, but only temporarily. He recovered, and I suppose outlived the salad he took. I have heard nothing to the contrary, and I imagine I should have been implicated on the inquest if there had been one. We had tea and rashers of bacon at a public-house, and came home, the last five or six miles in a prodigious thunderstorm. This was the great success of the day, which they certainly enjoyed more than anything else. The dinner had been great, and Mahogany had informed them, after a bottle of light champagne, that he never would come up the river "with ginger company" any more. But the getting so completely wet through was the culminating part of the entertainment. You never in your life saw such objects as they were; and their perfect unconsciousness that it was at all advisable to go home and change, or that there was anything to prevent their standing at the station two mortal hours to see me off, was wonderful. As to getting them to their dames with any sort of sense that they were damp, I abandoned the idea. I thought it a success when they went down the street as civilly as if they were just up and newly dressed, though they really looked as if you could have rubbed them to rags with a touch like saturated curl-paper.

v

We are first introduced to the neighbourhood of Henley in the account of the flight of Betty Higden already referred to, when we are taken to "the borders of Oxfordshire, so far had poor old Betty Higden strayed."

The poor soul breathed her last words into the sympathetic ear of Lizzie Hexam who was working at a paper mill on the Thames, whither she had gone to avoid her lover, Eugene Wrayburn.

This was the end of Betty Higden—she fell exhausted near the mill one evening and supported herself against a tree:

There now arose in the distance a great building full of lighted windows. Smoke was issuing from a high chimney in the rear of it, and there was the sound of a water-wheel at the side. Between her and the building lay a piece of water, in which the lighted windows were reflected, and on its nearest margin was a plantation of trees.

"I humbly thank the Power and the Glory," said Betty Higden, holding up her withered hands, "that I have come to my journey's end."

Hurley Lock, three miles before reaching Henley, is probably the Plashwater Weir Mill Lock of the story. It fits in very well with the course of events, as the river makes a big bend between Hurley and Henley, so that the distance between the two places by road is less than half that by water.

Eugene Wräyburn, in his light boat, had made a river trip to Henley to see Lizzie Hexam, and Bradley Headstone had followed him by road.

"Plashwater Weir-Mill Lock looked tranquil and pretty on an evening in the summer time. A soft air stirred the leaves of the fresh green trees, and passed like a smooth shadow over the river, and like a smoother shadow over the yielding grass. The voice of the falling water, like the voice of the sea and the wind, was an outer memory to a contemplative listener; but not particularly so to Mr. Riderhood, who sat on one of the blunt wooden levers of his lock-gates dozing. . . . The creaking lock-gates opened slowly, and the light boat passed in as soon as there was room enough, and the creaking lock-gates closed upon it, and it floated low down in the dock between the two sets of gates, until the water should rise and the second gates should open and let it out."

"Now I must follow him," said Bradley Headstone. "He takes this river road—the fool—to confuse observation." For two days disguised as a bargeman—perilously like Riderhood himself—he kept watch on the movements of the couple, with the result we all know; and then returned to Riderhood at the Lock.

Here was enacted the final scene of the tragedy when Headstone again walked from his school to the Lock House in the snow, and refused the demands Riderhood made on him. Riderhood kept the schoolmaster under strict observation, and when he departed and "turned towards London,

Riderhood caught him up and walked at his side." For three miles they so travelled and then "Bradley turned to retrace his course. Instantly Riderhood turned likewise."

Bradley re-entered the Lock-house. So did Riderhood. Bradley sat down in the window. Riderhood warmed himself at the fire. After an hour or more, Bradley abruptly got up again, and again went out, but this time turned the other way. Riderhood was close after him, caught him up in a few paces, and walked at his side. . . .

Bradley had caught him round the body. He seemed to be girdled with an iron ring. They were on the brink of the Lock, about midway between the two sets of gates.

"Let go!" said Riderhood, "or I'll get my knife out and slash you wherever I can cut you. Let go!"

Bradley was drawing to the Lock-edge. Riderhood was drawing away from it. It was a strong grapple and a fierce struggle, arm and leg. Bradley got him round, with his back to the Lock, and still worked him backward.

"Let go!" said Riderhood. "Stop! What are you trying at? You can't drown me. Ain't I told you that the man as has come through drowning can never be drowned? I can't be drowned."

"I can be!" returned Bradley, in a desperate clenched voice. "I am resolved to be. I'll hold you living, and I'll hold you dead. Come down!"

Riderhood went over into the smooth pit, backward, and Bradley Headstone upon him. When the two were found, lying under the ooze and scum behind one of the rotting gates, Riderhood's hold had relaxed, probably in falling, and his eyes were staring upward. But he was girdled still with Bradley's iron ring, and the rivets of the iron ring held tight.

Marsh Mill, about half a mile from Henley, is pointed out as the place where Lizzie worked, and near which Betty Higden died. It is, however, a little difficult to reconcile this with the account given in Chapter VI of Book 4 that "the inn where he (Wrayburn) stayed, like the village and the Mill, was not across the river, but on that side of the stream on which he walked."

The inn above referred to was doubtless the Red Lion, which is on the same side of the river as the village itself. It has the required "patch of inn lawn, sloping gently to the river" for the purpose of the landing of a boat. Bradley

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Headstone found out for himself the destination of Wrayburn whom he had followed, and reported it to the deputy lock-keeper at Plashwater Weir Mill Lock.

“He has put up for the night, at an Angler’s Inn,” was the fatigued and hoarse reply. “He goes on, up the river, at six in the morning. I have come back for a couple of hours’ rest.”

On the opposite side of the road to the Red Lion, by the side of the Angel Inn, runs the tow path, where Lizzie Hexam consented to meet Eugene by appointment. Eugene was there first walking with his hands behind him. “Some sheep were grazing on the grass by the river-side, and it seemed to him that he had never before heard the crisp tearing sound with which they cropped it.” Behind the haystack was the jealous Bradley Headstone disguised as a bargeman.

Here Lizzie walked with Eugene, and here they agreed to part. The very spot, gate and all, is depicted in Marcus Stone’s illustration entitled “The Parting by the River.”

Lizzie continued her walk along the path away from the town. Eugene turned back, passing Headstone, whom he did not recognise.

Eugene Wrayburn went the opposite way . . . he passed the sheep and passed the gate, and came within hearing of the village sounds, and came to the bridge. The inn where he stayed, like the village and the mill, was not across the river but on that side of the stream on which he walked. However, knowing a rushy bank and the back-water on the other side, to be a retired place . . . he crossed the bridge and sauntered on . . . looking down at the river. A landing place overshadowed by a willow and a pleasure boat lying moored there among some stakes caught his eye as he passed along. . . . He had sauntered far enough. Before returning to retrace his steps he stopped upon the margin to look down at the reflected night.

This would mean that he had turned to the left along the river-side after crossing the bridge. Here he was attacked by Bradley Headstone; “In an instant with a dreadful crash, the reflected night turned crooked, flames shot jaggedly across the air and the moon and stars came bursting

from the sky." He struggled valiantly with his assailant, but having been caught unawares was at a disadvantage; "there was another great crash and then a splash, and all was done."

Lizzie must have crossed the river by Marsh Lock gates, and then reached Henley by the main road, passing Marsh Mill, which is pointed out as the paper mill where Lizzie worked and near which Betty Higden died.

By this means she arrived near the spot where Eugene had been attacked, and hearing a cry for help and a fall into the river, she hastened to the spot from which the sounds came.

Finding the boat moored among the stakes under the willow trees, she boarded it with "a sure touch of her old practised hand."

Another moment she had cast off . . . and the boat had shot out into the moonlight, and she was rowing down the stream as never other woman rowed on English water.

. . . She passed the scene of the struggle—yonder it was, on her left. . . . She passed on her right the end of the village street, a hilly street that almost dipped into the river . . . she saw the drowning figure rise to the surface, slightly struggle and as if by instinct turn over on its side back to float. . . . With a touch, she unshipped her sculls, and crept aft in the boat . . . and by main strength lifted him in her arms and laid him at the bottom of the boat.

It was then she recognised the man she had saved was her lover "and the river and the shores rang to the terrible cry she uttered."

His inn . . . was the nearest place for succour. She rowed hard—rowed desperately, but never wildly and seldom removed her eyes from him in the bottom of the boat. . . . The boat touched the edge of the patch of inn lawn, sloping gently to the water. There were lights in the windows, but there chanced to be no one out of doors. She made the boat fast, and again by main strength took him up, and never laid him down until she laid him down in the house.

It was at this inn in "a darkened and hushed room," that the bed-side marriage of Eugene Wrayburn with Lizzie Hexam took place.

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Henley is also mentioned in *Little Dorrit*: the first recorded utterance of Mr. F's aunt was that "when we lived at Henley, Barnes's gander was stole by tinkers."

VI

Reading possesses some noteworthy associations with the life of Dickens. It had the honour of inviting the novelist to represent it in Parliament. This was in 1841. Although, as he wrote, "my principles and inclinations would lead me to aspire to the distinction you invite me to seek," yet he had to decline the invitation as he could not satisfy himself that entering Parliament would enable him to pursue the honourable independence without which, as he said, he could neither preserve his own respect or that of his constituents.

The first public visit of Dickens to Reading was on December 9th, 1851, with the Amateur Company of the Guild of Literature and Art in Lord Lytton's play, "Not so Bad as we Seem," at the Town Hall, and a few years later (1854), Dickens having become president of the Reading Literary and Mechanics' Institution in succession to his friend Talfourd, who was a native of Reading, read the Carol at the Institute on December 19th, in aid of the funds. Four years later Dickens was again at Reading (8th November, 1858) at the New Hall giving one of his famous readings. The Institute was in London Street and is now a Methodist Chapel.

Reading in the novels figures but once, and that in the early chapters of *Bleak House*. It was to Reading that Esther Summerson came by stage coach from Windsor, where she had hitherto been residing with Mrs. Rachael. Chapter III of the book gives us a pretty picture of the young girl sitting on the low seat of the coach with her bird-cage on the straw at her feet, looking out of the window full of sorrow at leaving the only home she had known. It was during this journey that she first met her guardian, John Jarndyce, then unknown to her, who comforted her with "A piece of the best plum-cake that can be got for money —sugar on the outside an inch thick, like fat on mutton chops," and who left the coach "a little way short of Reading."

Her destination was Greenleaf, the school of the twin Miss Donnys, and here she passed what she described as "six happy quiet years" before coming up to the fog of London and its Chancery Courts.

We left him at a milestone. I often walked past it afterwards, and never for a long time, without thinking of him, and half expecting to meet him.

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There is a bare mention of Oxford in *David Copperfield* and its sole association with Dickens rests with two readings which he gave at the old Town Hall, demolished in 1891–2, on November 5th and 6th, 1858, and with the reading at the same place in the October of the following year. He does not appear to have visited Oxford on his later reading tours.

CHAPTER FIVE

TO BATH WITH MR. PICKWICK

I

AT the time when *Pickwick* was written, Dickens had personal recollections of the Bath Road, possibly quite as vivid as those he had of the road to Dover with which we have already dealt.

The interval of two years between his first published sketch “Mr. Minns and his Cousin,” as it is now called, and the beginning of *The Pickwick Papers*, saw Dickens making rapid strides in his profession as reporter for the “Morning Chronicle.”

“To the wholesome training of severe newspaper work when I was a very young man I constantly refer my first successes,” he said on one occasion, and to his experiences then, we owe the graphic pictures he has given us in *The Pickwick Papers* and elsewhere, of travelling by road, and the descriptions of the old inns and other places he visited during the elections of 1835. Now was opened up to him a wide and varied range of experience, which his genial, youthful observation made quaint and humorous.

In 1845 he made a confession of these days, in a letter to Forster, in which he said:

There never was anybody connected with newspapers, who in the same space of time had so much express and post-chaise experience as I. And what gentlemen they were to serve in such things at the old “Morning Chronicle!” Great or small, it did not matter. I have had to charge for half a dozen break-downs in half a dozen times as many miles. I have had to charge for the damage of a great-coat from the drippings of a blazing wax-candle, in writing through the smallest hours of the night in a swift-flying carriage and pair. I have had to charge for all sorts of breakages fifty times in a journey without question, such being the ordinary results of the pace

which we went at. I have charged for broken hats, broken luggage, broken chaises, broken harness—every-thing but a broken head, which is the only thing they would have grumbled to pay for.

Forster is also able to quote a letter written by Dickens to the Editor of the "Morning Chronicle," during one of his Bath road expeditions, which shows the conditions under which the work was done. It is dated a "Tuesday morning" in May 1835, from the Bush Inn, Bristol, and states, to quote Forster, who does not give the letter verbatim:

He expects to forward "the conclusion of Russell's dinner" by Cooper's Company's coach leaving the Bush at half-past six next morning; and by the first Ball's coach on Thursday morning he will forward the report of the Bath dinner, endorsing the parcel for immediate delivery, with extra rewards for the porter. Beard is to go over to Bath next morning. He is himself to come back by the mail from Marlborough; he has no doubt, if Lord John makes a speech of any ordinary dimensions, it can be done by the time Marlborough is reached; "and taking into consideration the immense importance of having the addition of saddle-horses from thence, it is beyond all doubt, worth an effort . . . I need not say," he continues, "that it will be sharp work and will require two of us; for we shall both be up the whole of the previous night, and shall have to sit up all night again to get it off in time." He adds that as soon as they have had a little sleep they will return to town as quickly as they can; but they have, if the express succeeds, to stop at sundry places along the road to pay money and notify satisfaction. And so, for himself and Beard, he is his editor's very sincerely.

Something to the same effect he said publicly twenty years later on the occasion of his presiding, in May 1865, at the second annual dinner of the Newspaper Press Fund.

I have pursued the calling of a reporter under circum-
stances of which many of my brethren here can form no
adequate conception. I have often transcribed for the
printer, from my shorthand notes, important public
speeches . . . on the palm of my hand, by the light of
a dark lantern, in a post-chaise and four, galloping through
a wild country, and through the dead of the night, at

the then surprising rate of fifteen miles an hour. . . . Returning home from exciting political meetings in the country to the waiting press in London, I do verily believe I have been upset in almost every description of vehicle known in this country. I have been, in my time, belated on miry by-roads, towards the small hours, forty or fifty miles from London, in a wheelless carriage, with exhausted horses and drunken post-boys, and have got back in time for publication, to be received with never-forgotten compliments.

“London is so small,” says a character in *The Uncommercial Traveller*. “If you go west you come to Hounslow,” and Hounslow is so much a part of London to-day, that one does not know where it begins or ends.

When Martin Chuzzlewit left Mr. Pecksniff’s, he was fortunate in getting a lift as far as Hounslow, by a driver whose “spruce appearance was sufficiently explained by his connexion with a large stage-coaching establishment at Hounslow, whither he was conveying his load from a farm belonging to the concern in Wiltshire.”

Hounslow Heath is unforgettably associated with Sam Weller and his song of “Bold Turpin Vunce on Hounslow Heath. His bold mare Bess bestrode—er.”

In *Great Expectations* we are told that the woman who was murdered by Estella’s mother, was “found dead in a barn near Hounslow Heath.”

This part of the road was commented on by Dickens in *The Holly Tree Inn*, the Christmas number for 1855, when he speaks of the decay of the roadside inns especially in this part of the country.

Casting my eyes upon my Holly-Tree fire, I next discerned among the glowing coals the pictures of a score or more of those wonderful English posting-inns which we are all so sorry to have lost, which were so large and so comfortable, and which were such monuments of British submission to rapacity and extortion. He who would see these houses pining away, let him walk from Basing-stoke, or even Windsor, to London, by way of Hounslow and moralise on their perishing remains; the stables crumbling to dust; unsettled labourers and wanderers bivouacking in the outhouses; grass growing in the yards; the rooms, where erst so many hundred beds of down were made up, let off to Irish lodgers at eighteenpence a week.

Mr. Pickwick, having decided that he would pay "Not one halfpenny" of the costs of the case which the wily Mrs. Bardell at the instigation of Dodson and Fogg had brought against him, finally answered his own question "where shall we go next," by saying, Bath. So to Bath they accordingly did go, and "Sam was at once despatched to the White Horse Cellar, to take five places by the half-past seven o'clock coach, next morning." And the next morning —a damp and unpropitious one we are told, found them at the White Horse Cellar, Piccadilly, with twenty minutes to spare, so they repaired to the travellers' room "the last resource of human dejectio i."

Here they encountered the "stern eyed man . . . with a good deal of black hair . . . and large black whiskers," Mr. Dowler, who was "going to Bath on pleasure" with his wife, of whom he was very jealous. At the commencement of the journey we are told of a remarkable coincidence. Mr. Winkle had got inside the coach and Mr. Pickwick was preparing to follow him, when

Sam Weller came up to his master, and whispering in his ear, begged to speak to him, with an air of the deepest mystery.

"Well, Sam," said Mr. Pickwick, "what's the matter now?"

"Here's rayther a rum go, sir," replied Sam.

"What?" inquired Mr. Pickwick.

"This here, sir," rejoined Sam. "I'm wery much afeerd, sir, that the proprietor o' this here coach is a playin' some imperence with us."

"How is that, Sam?" said Mr. Pickwick; "arn't the names down on the way-bill?"

"The names is not only down on the vay-bill, sir," replied Sam, "but they've painted vun on 'em up on the door o' the coach." As Sam spoke, he pointed to the part of the coach door on which the proprietor's name usually appears; and there sure enough, in gilt letters of a goodly size, was the magic name of Pickwick.

"Dear me," exclaimed Mr. Pickwick, "what a very extraordinary thing."

"Yes, but that ain't all," said Sam, "not content with writing up Pickwick, they puts Moses afore it, vich I calls adding insult to injury."

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Sam was much perturbed when he found his master did not propose to take any action. "Ain't nobody to be whopped for takin' this here liberty?" he enquired; but Mr. Pickwick only answered "Certainly not" which caused Sam to feel convinced that the trial had broken his spirits, and "as an illustration of the manner in which he took this circumstance to heart, he did not speak another word until the coach reached the Kensington turnpike," a fact "wholly unprecedented."

As a matter of fact a Moses Pickwick was the proprietor of the London and Bath service of coaches, and it was doubtless from him that Dickens took the name of his hero. There is preserved in Bath a screen known as The Pickwick Screen which formerly stood in the Bath coach office, and which contains particulars of the regulations under which goods and passengers were carried, and it is signed at the foot, Moses Pickwick.

The Bath road is perhaps the most famous coaching road in the kingdom, and the coaches in those days took twelve hours to accomplish its 106 odd miles, and strange to say we have no mention of any places en route, save Kensington in the above paragraph. The beauties of Maidenhead, Reading, Newbury, and Marlborough, evidently did not concern Mr. Pickwick, neither did the village which bears his name, and which is situated nine miles this side of Bath. Perhaps Sam was afraid to venture on the topic again, or maybe Dickens was ignorant of the fact that there was a village which had given its name to the grandfather of the coach proprietor.

But if Dickens does not give us any particulars of the route to Bath, he certainly discourses in a very interesting manner on the behaviour of stage-coach passengers in general. Much of this was his own observation, for although he was only twenty-four when *The Pickwick Papers* were written, he had, in the previous year, made more than one visit to Bath in the course of his duties as Reporter to the Chronicle.

The knowledge of the conditions of the road at that time is shown in the story of the Bagman's Uncle told in a later Chapter of *The Pickwick Papers*, when Tom Smart, of "the great house of Bilson and Slum, Cateaton Street, City," drove "the little neck-or-nothing sort of gig, with a clay-coloured body and red wheels, and the vixenish ill-tempered, fast-going bay mare that looked like a cross between a butcher's horse and a two-penny post-office pony."

It was, we are told, "one winter's evening, about five

o'clock, just as it began to grow dusk, a man in a gig might have been seen urging his tired horse along the road which leads across Marlborough Downs, in the direction of Bristol."

There are many pleasanter places even in this dreary world, than Marlborough Downs, when it blows hard; and if you throw in beside, a gloomy winter's evening, a miry and sloppy road, and a pelting fall of heavy rain, and try the effect, by way of experiment, in your own proper person, you will experience the full force of this observation.

The clay-coloured gig with red wheels at length "drew up, of her own accord, before a road-side inn on the right-hand side of the way, about half a quarter of a mile from the end of the Downs."

This is said to be the Waggon and Horses inn at Beckhampton which Dickens goes on to describe as follows:

It was a strange old place, built of a kind of shingle, inlaid, as it were, with cross-beams, with gabled-topped windows projecting completely over the pathway, and a low door with a dark porch, and a couple of steep steps leading down into the house, instead of the modern fashion of half a dozen shallow ones leading up to it. It was a comfortable-looking place though, for there was a strong cheerful light in the bar-window.

Here Tom Smart drank hot punch in front of "a substantial matter-of-fact roaring fire, composed of something short of a bushel of coals, and wood enough to make half a dozen decent gooseberry bushes, piled half-way up the chimney, and roaring and crackling with a sound that of itself would have warmed the heart of any reasonable man," with "his slippered feet on the fender, and his back to the open door" and saw "a charming prospect of the bar reflected in the glass over the chimney-piece, with delightful rows of green bottles and gold labels, together with jars of pickles and preserves, and cheeses and boiled hams, and rounds of beef, arranged on shelves in the most tempting and delicious array."

Tom began to fall in love with the buxom landlady, and after several tumblers of punch, went to bed in "a good large room with big closets, and a bed which might have served for a whole boarding-school, to say nothing of a couple of oaken presses that would have held the baggage of a small

army; but what struck Tom's fancy most was a strange, grim-looking high-backed chair, carved in the most fantastic manner, with a flowered damask cushion, and the round knobs at the bottom of the legs carefully tied up in red cloth, as if it had got the gout in its toes."

For a full account of all the happenings in this room with the "queer chair" the reader is directed to Chapter XLIX of *The Pickwick Papers*.

III

Returning to the Pickwickians themselves, we learn that the party reached Bath in safety.

At seven o'clock p.m. Mr. Pickwick and his friends, and Mr. Dowler and his wife, respectively retired to their private sitting-rooms at the White Hart Hotel, opposite the Great Pump Room, Bath, where the waiters, from their costume, might be mistaken for Westminster boys, only they destroy the illusion by behaving themselves much better.

The White Hart is gone now; it does not hold a long record in Dickensian annals, as very little indeed is said about it, and Mr. Pickwick stayed there a night or two only prior to taking lodgings in the Royal Crescent; but it will always be remembered that a Mr. Pickwick kept the Hotel in the days when Dickens visited it!

This was the Moses Pickwick to whom Sam Weller referred when the Bath Coach was standing outside the White Horse Cellar in London. His grandfather, Eleazer Pickwick, was a foundling picked up at the village of Pickwick, nine miles from Bath. Eleazer Pickwick founded the coaching business carried on by his grandson Moses, with much success; this Moses Pickwick also became the proprietor of the White Hart Inn at Bath, the starting place of the coaches. The hotel was demolished in 1867, and the present Grand Pump Room Hotel stands on its site. The effigy of the White Hart which formerly adorned the entrance is now to be seen at the White Hart Inn at Widcombe, a suburb of Bath.

If, as there is reason to suppose, Dickens visited Bath in 1837, just when the Bath chapters were being written, it must have been a peculiar experience for him, the great author of *The Pickwick Papers*, the book which everybody

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was reading, to travel to Bath by the Pickwick Coach and to stop at mine host Pickwick's Hotel.

The morning after their arrival at the White Hart Hotel, Mr. Pickwick was visited by Angelo Cyrus Bantam, Esq., the Master of the Ceremonies:

“Welcome to Ba-ath, sir. This is indeed an acquisition. Most welcome to Ba-ath, sir. It is long—very long, Mr. Pickwick, since you drank the waters. It appears an age, Mr. Pickwick. Re-markable!”

“It is a very long time since I drank the waters, certainly,” replied Mr. Pickwick; “for to the best of my knowledge I was never here before.”

“Never in Ba-ath, Mr. Pickwick!” exclaimed the Grand Master, letting the hand fall in astonishment. “Never in Ba-ath! He! he! Mr. Pickwick, you are a wag. Not bad, not bad. Good, good. He! he! he! Re-markable!”

“Bantam,” said Mr. Dowler, “Mr. Pickwick and his friends are strangers. They must put their names down. Where's the book?”

“The register of the distinguished visitors in Ba-ath will be at the Pump Room this morning at two o'clock,” replied the M.C. “Will you guide our friends to that splendid building, and enable me to procure their autographs?”

Strange to say, it was to the Assembly Rooms and not to the Pump Room that the party was conducted, for we read:

At the appointed hour, Mr. Pickwick and his friends, escorted by Dowler, repaired to the Assembly Rooms, and wrote their names down in a book. An instance of condescension at which Angelo Bantam was even more overpowered than before.

Bantam's mission was not without its object, as he succeeded in getting the party to promise to attend the Assembly Rooms that evening.

“This is a ball-night,” said the M.C. . . . “The ball-nights in Ba-ath are moments snatched from Paradise; rendered bewitching by music, beauty, elegance, fashion, etiquette, and—and—above all, by the absence of trades-people . . . who have an amalgamation of themselves

at the Guildhall every fortnight, which is, to say the least, remarkable."

Prior to attending the Ball at the Assembly Rooms that evening, Mr. Pickwick took a short walk through the city, and "arrived at the unanimous conclusion that Park Street was very much like the perpendicular streets a man sees in a dream, which he cannot get up for the life of him."

The Assembly Rooms where Mr. Pickwick made the acquaintance of Lord Mutanhead, the Dowager Lady Snuphanuph, Mrs. Colonel Wugsby, and Miss Bolo, are intact.

Bath being full, the company, and the sixpences for tea, poured in, in shoals. In the ball-room, the long card-room, the octagonal card-room, the staircases, and the passages, the hum of many voices, and the sound of many feet, were perfectly bewildering. Dresses rustled, feathers waved, lights shone, and jewels sparkled. There was the music—not of the quadrille band, for it had not yet commenced; but the music of soft tiny footsteps, with now and then a clear merry laugh—low and gentle, but very pleasant to hear in a female voice, whether in Bath or elsewhere. . . .

In the tea-room, and hovering round the card-tables, were a vast number of queer old ladies and decrepit old gentlemen, discussing all the small talk and scandal of the day, with a relish and gusto which sufficiently bespoke the intensity of the pleasure they derived from the occupation. Mingled with these groups, were three or four matchmaking mammas, appearing to be wholly absorbed by the conversation in which they were taking part, but failing not from time to time to cast an anxious sidelong glance upon their daughters, who, remembering the maternal injunction to make the best use of their youth, had already commenced incipient flirtations in the mislaying of scarves, putting on gloves, setting down cups, and so forth; slight matters apparently, but which may be turned to surprisingly good account by expert practitioners.

Lounging near the doors, and in remote corners, were various knots of silly young men, displaying various varieties of puppyism and stupidity. . . .

And lastly, seated on some of the back benches, where they had already taken up their positions for the evening, were divers unmarried ladies past their grand climacteric,

who, not dancing because there were no partners for them, and not playing cards lest they should be set down as irretrievably single, were in the favourable situation of being able to abuse everybody without reflecting on themselves.

The very room where the famous game of cards was played is to be seen: and it is to be remembered that Dickens gave readings in the large hall on February 9th, 1867 and January 29th, 1869.

The original of Mr. Bantam was Mr. Jervois, who was the M.C. of Bath at the time *The Pickwick Papers* were written. He lived at No. 21 Portland Place, although it was in Queen Square that Dickens located this eccentric creation, to whom Sam was despatched for the tickets for the Assembly Ball.

Sam Weller put on his hat in a very easy and graceful manner, and thrusting his hands in his waistcoat pockets, walked with great deliberation to Queen Square, whistling as he went along, several of the most popular airs of the day, as arranged with entirely new movements for that noble instrument the organ, either mouth or barrel. Arriving at the number in Queen Square to which he had been directed, he left off whistling, and gave a cheerful knock, which was instantaneously answered by a powdered-headed footman in gorgeous livery, and of symmetrical stature.

Eleazer Pickwick, brother of Moses, lived at No. 10 Queen Square, in 1837. It is interesting to note that at the same time an A. Snodgrass was living at No. 16 Trim Street.

It was to Queen Square that Sam came again on the occasion of his invitation by the select company of Bath Footmen, to the "friendly swarry, consisting of a boiled leg of mutton with the usual trimmings." Here he met Mr. Joseph Smauker "leaning his powdered head against a lamp-post," and with him "walked towards High Street," and turning "down a by-street," reached "a small greengrocer's shop."

Crossing the greengrocer's shop, and putting their hats on the stairs in the little passage behind it, they walked into a small parlour; and here the full splendour of the scene burst upon Mr. Weller's view.

A couple of tables were put together in the middle of the parlour, covered with three or four cloths of different

wash themselves; and a band plays afterwards, to congratulate the remainder on their having done so. There is another pump-room, into which infirm ladies and gentlemen are wheeled, in such an astonishing variety of chairs and chaises, that any adventurous individual who goes in with the regular number of toes, is in imminent danger of coming out without them; and there is a third, into which the quiet people go, for it is less noisy than either. There is an immensity of promenading, on crutches and off, with sticks and without, and a great deal of conversation, and liveliness, and pleasantry.

Dickens had surely a little fun to poke at the visitors to the Pump Room at Bath when he says:

Mr. Pickwick began to drink the waters with the utmost assiduity. Mr. Pickwick took them systematically. He drank a quarter of a pint before breakfast, and then walked up a hill; and another quarter of a pint after breakfast, and then walked down a hill; and after every fresh quarter of a pint, Mr. Pickwick declared, in the most solemn and emphatic terms, that he felt a great deal better; whereat his friends were very much delighted, though they had not been previously aware that there was anything the matter with him.

Mr. Weller's opinion of the Bath waters was communicated to Mr. Smauker on their way to the "swarry."

"I thought they wos particklery unpleasant," replied Sam.

"Ah," said Mr. John Smauker, "you disliked the killibeate taste, perhaps?"

"I don't know much about that 'ere," said Sam. "I thought they'd a very strong flavour o' warm flat irons."

Dickens criticises the monotony of the life of the Bath visitor in the following terse account of their daily round.

The regular water drinkers, Mr. Pickwick among the number, met each other in the Pump Room, took their quarter of a pint, and walked constitutionally. At the afternoon's promenade . . . all the great people and all the morning water drinkers, met in grand assemblage. After this they walked out, or drove out or were pushed out in bath chairs . . . After this they went home. If it were theatre night, perhaps they met at the theatre; if it were assembly night, they met at the rooms; and if it were neither they met the next day.

The Pickwickians stayed in Bath for about four months. They arrived on the 16th February and left, according to Chapter XL, the end of the first week in Trinity term.

As Mr. Pickwick contemplated a stay of at least two months in Bath, he deemed it advisable to take private lodgings for himself and friends for that period; and as a favourable opportunity offered for their securing, on moderate terms, the upper portion of a house in the Royal Crescent, which was larger than they required, Mr. and Mrs. Dowler offered to relieve them of a bed-room and sitting-room. This proposition was at once accepted, and in three days' time they were all located in their new abode.

The number of the house is not given, but as the houses are practically all of one pattern, and only numbers 5 and 16 were, in those days, let out in lodgings, it is not difficult for us to make a choice.

The landlady's name was Mrs. Craddock, the name of the landlady of the cottage at Chalk, where Dickens spent his honeymoon a few months before the Bath chapters were written.

Here Mr. Winkle met with that never failing mirth provoking adventure with the Sedan chair, the story of which is worth briefly recording as follows:

Mrs. Dowler was out at a party. Mr. Dowler had promised to wait up for her return, but fell asleep, and we read:

Just as the clock struck three, there was blown into the crescent a sedan chair with Mrs. Dowler inside, borne by one short fat chairman, and one long thin one, who had had much ado to keep their bodies perpendicular: to say nothing of the chair. But on that high ground, and in the crescent, which the wind swept round and round as if it were going to tear the paving stones up, its fury was tremendous. They were very glad to set the chair down, and give a good round loud double-knock at the street door.

They waited some time but nobody came. At last they aroused Mr. Winkle, who descended to the front door.

Mr. Winkle, being half asleep, . . . opened the door a little, and peeped out. The first thing he saw, was the red glare of the link-boy's torch. Startled by the sudden fear that the house might be on fire, he hastily threw the door wide open. . . . At this instant there came a

violent gust of wind; the light was blown out; Mr. Winkle felt himself irresistibly impelled on to the steps; and the door blew to, with a loud crash.

Here was a predicament! "Mr. Winkle, catching sight of a lady's face at the window of the sedan, turned hastily round, plied the knocker with all his might and main, and called frantically upon the chairman to take the chair away again."

"The people are coming down the Crescent now. There are ladies with 'em; cover me up with something. Stand before me!" roared Mr. Winkle. But the chairmen were too much exhausted with laughing to afford him the slightest assistance. . . . Mr. Winkle gave a last hopeless knock; the ladies were only a few doors off. He threw away the extinguished candle, which, all this time, he had held above his head, and fairly bolted into the sedan-chair where Mrs. Dowler was.

At this juncture Mrs. Craddock the landlady roused Mr. Dowler, who swore vengeance against Mr. Winkle and seizing a small supper-knife, tore into the street.

But Mr. Winkle didn't wait for him. He no sooner heard the horrible threat of the valorous Dowler, than he bounced out of the sedan, quite as quickly as he had bounced in, and throwing off his slippers into the road, took to his heels and tore round the Crescent, hotly pursued by Dowler and the watchman. He kept ahead; the door was open as he came round the second time; he rushed in, slammed it in Dowler's face, mounted to his bed-room, locked the door, piled a wash-hand-stand, chest of drawers, and table against it, and packed up a few necessaries ready for flight with the first ray of morning.

Some writers assert that Dickens was in error in stating that Winkle ran round and round the Crescent hotly pursued by Mr. Dowler and the watchman; and that he had the Circus in his mind; but we do not hold that opinion. It is on record that Dickens made several alterations in the pictures submitted by Phiz; that the houses in the drawing show the houses in the Crescent. It was quite consistent with the account that Winkle ran round and round the Crescent, that Winkle should double back when he got to the end of the semi-circular sweep, and so eventually reach safety in his own door; had he been running round the Circus he could have eluded his pursuers very well by means of one of the

turnings. There is another fact to be noted; if in the Circus, Winkle could not have observed the party in the distance coming towards him, and would not at all times have been visible to his pursuers; also Dickens describes the Crescent as an exposed and unsheltered place, which description would not apply to the Circus.

Bath has a further claim to Dickensian interest in the fact that it may be said to have been the birthplace of Little Nell. No. 35 St. James's Square bears an interesting tablet; it was once the residence of Walter Savage Landor, for whom Dickens had a real great affection and regard. In 1840 Dickens accompanied by his wife, Maclise and Forster visited Landor, and, according to Forster "it was during three happy days passed together there that the fancy which was shortly to take the form of Little Nell first occurred to its author."

To Forster, who also wrote the life of Landor, we are indebted for the information that Landor told him he had never in his life regretted anything so much as his having failed to carry out an intention he had formed respecting this house in St. James's Square, Bath; for "he had meant to purchase it, and then and there to have burnt it to the ground, to the end that no meaner association should ever desecrate the birthplace of Little Nell."

In unveiling the tablet on the 91st anniversary of Dickens's birth, Mr. Percy Fitzgerald said that "from that modest unassuming mansion the one image had set out on its travels all over the world, and was known like a living being wherever English was read."

There is a story, recorded first we believe by Mr. Percy Fitzgerald in connection with the Saracen's Head Inn in Walcot Street, a quaint and ancient structure, to the effect that Dickens as a young reporter stayed here in 1835, and was lodged in a building across the yard up a flight of steps, still to be seen. However delightful the story may be of his patience with the candle that would persist in going out as he crossed the yard, we are unable to accept it as a fact, without further corroboration.

There was only one other character whom Dickens "sent to Bath," and that was Miss Volumnia in *Bleak House*; she "retired to Bath . . . on an annual present from Sir Leicester. . . . She has an extensive acquaintance at Bath among appalling old gentlemen . . . and is of high standing in that dreary city."

In a later chapter she is referred to as living in "that grass grown city of the ancients, Bath."

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In spite of the happy spirit displayed in the Bath chapters of *The Pickwick Papers*, Dickens does not appear to have had a very high regard for the beautiful city, according to these references to it in *Bleak House*, and in a letter to Forster written on the occasion of his last visit in January 1869 when he stayed at the White Lion Hotel.

Landor's ghost goes along the silent streets here before me. . . . The place looks to me like a cemetery which the Dead have succeeded in rising and taking. Having built streets of their old gravestones, they wander about scantily trying to 'look alive.' A dead failure.

IV

The Bath incidents of *The Pickwick Papers* end with the "shoulder of mutton swarthy" which took place at the same time as the Sedan Chair adventure of Mr. Winkle. That gentleman, wishing to escape from the wrath of the valorous Dowler, resolved to quit Bath, and we can now follow him into the neighbouring town of Bristol.

Mr. Winkle we are told, "grasped his carpet-bag, and creeping stealthily down-stairs, shut the detestable street-door with as little noise as possible, and walked off."

Bending his steps towards the Royal Hotel, he found a coach on the point of starting for Bristol, and, thinking Bristol as good a place for his purpose as any other he could go to, he mounted the box, and reached his place of destination in such time as the pair of horses, who went the whole stage and back again twice a day or more, could be reasonably supposed to arrive there.

The Royal Hotel mentioned is the present York House Hotel, and called the Royal, as Queen Victoria stayed there in 1830, when Princess. Dickens stayed here on the occasion of his visit in 1867. In 1869 he stayed at the White Lion Hotel, since demolished.

Arrived at Bristol, Winkle "took up his quarters at the Bush, designing to postpone any communication by letter with Mr. Pickwick until it was probable that Mr. Dowler's wrath might have in some degree evaporated."

The Bush is gone now; until 1864 it stood near the Guildhall on the site now occupied by Lloyd's Bank.

His quarters fixed, Mr. Winkle walked forth to view the city, which Dickens informs us "struck him as being a shade more dirty than any place he had ever seen."

Having inspected the docks and shipping, and viewed the cathedral, he inquired his way to Clifton, and being directed thither, took the route which was pointed out to him. But, as the pavements of Bristol are not the widest or cleanest upon earth, so its streets are not altogether the straightest or least intricate; Mr. Winkle being greatly puzzled by their manifold windings and twistings, looked about him for a decent shop in which he could apply afresh, for counsel and instruction.

This he found in the surgery of "Sawyer, late Nockemorff," which it has been suggested might have been situated in Park Street, quite a different sort of thoroughfare then from what it is to-day.

In the days of Mr. Pickwick the street was much steeper, the viaduct not having yet been built, and at the bottom was an old fashioned chemist's shop that is said to have answered the description of "something between a shop and a private house."

Here Mr. Winkle encountered Mr. Bob Sawyer, late of Guy's and Lant Street, making very merry with his old friend Ben Allen, and after a convivial evening, he returned to the Bush to meet the very Mr. Dowler he had so zealously sought to avoid. However, as it turned out that both had run away from each other, friendship was soon restored.

Early next morning, Sam Weller made his appearance at the Bush and by means of a trick locked the unfortunate Winkle in his room until such time as Mr. Pickwick should arrive from Bath, and we read that "at eight o'clock in the evening Mr. Pickwick himself walked into the coffee-room of the Bush tavern, and told Sam with a smile, to his very great relief, that he had done quite right."

Ascertaining from Mr. Winkle that Arabella Allen was "immured . . . somewhere near the Downs" it was decided that Sam Weller should start next morning on an expedition of discovery. •

"Away he walked, up one street and down another—we were going to say, up one hill and down another, only it's all uphill at Clifton—without meeting with anything or anybody that tended to throw the faintest light on the matter in hand."

The Clifton Suspension Bridge was not erected at that time. It was not until 1863 that it was removed from Charing Cross to Bristol, else, Dickens in viewing through the eyes of Sam, the old Hungerford Bridge, might have revived

the scene of his early sufferings as a poor boy in the Blacking Factory.

Sam struggled across the Downs against a good high wind, wondering whether it was always necessary to hold your hat on with both hands in that part of the country, and came to a shady by-place about which were sprinkled several little villas of quiet and secluded appearance. Outside a stable-door at the bottom of a long back lane without a thoroughfare, a groom in undress was idling about, apparently persuading himself that he was doing something with a spade and a wheelbarrow.

Sam strolled down the lane, sat upon "a good large stone just opposite the wheelbarrow" and vainly endeavoured to elicit some information from the "surly groom" who ultimately waxed very wroth and disappeared.

Sam continued to sit on the large stone, meditating upon what was best to be done, and revolving in his mind a plan for knocking at all the doors within five miles of Bristol, taking them at a hundred and fifty or two hundred a day, and endeavouring to find Miss Arabella by that expedient.

Here Sam encountered Mary the housemaid whom he had previously met at the house of Mr. Nupkins the Mayor, at Ipswich, and to whom he had indited his famous valentine.

From her, Sam learnt that Arabella Allen was living in the next house, the one to which the "surly groom" was attached and after helping Mary to shake the carpets (can we not on the spot conjure up the delightful scene?) arranged to come in the evening, when he obtained the interview with Arabella from the pear tree. The result of this was that on the following evening Mr. Pickwick, in the hope of being able to intercede with the young lady, proceeded to the garden, aided by Sam and a dark lantern.

The lantern played all sorts of tricks in the hands of Mr. Pickwick, sending its beam of light in many an unwanted direction. After Mr. Pickwick, by the aid of Sam's back had the interview with Arabella over the garden wall, Mr. Winkle declared his passion; Mr. Pickwick "keeping guard in the lane with that 'ere dark lantern, like an amiable Guy Fawkes," to quote Sam.

"While these things were going on in the open air, an elderly gentleman of scientific attainments was seated in his library, two or three houses off, writing a philosophical

treatise" and "was very much surprised by observing a most brilliant light glide through the air, at a short distance above the ground, and almost instantaneously vanish." This caused him to speculate on the origin of so strange a phenomenon.

Venturing as far as the garden gate, he met the party returning down the lane, and Sam, "seeing a man's head peeping out very cautiously within half a yard of his own, gave it a gentle tap with his clenched fist, which knocked it, with a hollow sound, against the gate. Having performed this feat with great suddenness and dexterity, Mr. Weller caught Mr. Pickwick up on his back, and followed Mr. Winkle down the lane at a pace which, considering the burden he carried, was perfectly astonishing."

The result of that evening's amusing adventure was that the scientific gentleman in a masterly treatise demonstrated "that these wonderful lights were the effect of electricity; and clearly proved the same by detailing how a flash of fire danced before his eyes when he put his head out of the gate, and how he received a shock which stunned him for a quarter of an hour afterwards; which demonstration delighted all the Scientific Associations beyond measure, and caused him to be considered a light of science ever afterwards."

At a later period in the history of the Pickwickians, Mr. Pickwick and Sam Weller hastened to Bristol in respect to the love affairs of Mr. Winkle, and again put up at the Bush, where the Bagman told that rare old story of the old coaches and of the "dead letters which these ghosts of mail coaches carry in their bags."

The next morning Mr. Pickwick, Sam, Benjamin Allen, and Bob Sawyer left for that memorable trip to Birmingham, where they were to see the elder Mr. Winkle, and smooth out the love affair of Arabella Allen and Mr. Winkle.

So long as their progress was confined to the streets of Bristol, the facetious Bob kept his professional green spectacles on, and conducted himself with becoming steadiness and gravity of demeanour; merely giving utterance to divers verbal witticisms for the exclusive behoof and entertainment of Mr. Samuel Weller. But when they emerged on the open road he threw off his green spectacles and his gravity together, and performed a great variety of practical jokes, which were calculated to attract the attention of the passers-by, and to render the carriage and

those it contained, objects of more than ordinary curiosity; the least conspicuous among these feats being a most vociferous imitation of a key-bugle, and the ostentatious display of a crimson silk pocket-handkerchief attached to a walking-stick, which was occasionally waved in the air with various gestures indicative of supremacy and defiance.

The Pickwick Papers is the only book in which Bristol figures to any great extent. There is a reference to the city in *Barnaby Rudge* when a few weeks after the execution at Newgate, we are told that "Mr. Haredale stood alone in the mail coach office at Bristol . . . about to re-visit London for the last time" and we are further told that "the journey was a very different one in those days from what the present generation find it; but it came to an end as the longest journey will, and he stood again in the streets of the metropolis."

Dickens's first public appearance in Bristol was in 1851, when on November 12th his company of strolling players appeared in "Not so Bad as we Seem" at the Victoria Rooms, Clifton, in aid of the Guild of Literature and Art.

On this occasion he wrote to his wife, "We are well lodged and boarded and living high up on the Downs are quite out of the filth of Bristol."

And in another letter he gave a description of the reception the play received:

We had a noble night last night. The room, which is the largest but one in England, was crammed in every part. The effect of from thirteen to fourteen hundred people, all well dressed and all seated in an unbroken chamber, except that the floor rose high towards the end of the hall, was most splendid, and we never played to a better audience.

On Tuesday January 19th, 1858, Dickens gave his first reading in Bristol, in aid of the Athenæum.

His next visit was as a professional reader, on August 2nd, in the same year, when he wrote:

In that large room at Clifton, the people were perfectly taken off their legs by *The Chimes*—started—looked at each other—started again—looked at me—and then burst into a storm of applause.

He was again at the same hall four days later.

In another letter referring to this reading he told how "a torrent of five hundred shillings bore Arthur (Smith) away,

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pounded him against the wall, flowed on to the seats over his body, scratched him, and damaged his best dress suit. All to his unspeakable joy."

On May 9th and 10th, 1866, Dickens gave further readings at Clifton, when according to a letter, he stayed at the Downs Hotel. On January 20th, 1869, he was again at the Victoria Rooms, and five days later, on January 25th, witnessed his last reading with, so he wrote, his sister-in-law, "by far the best Murder yet done"; while at the same time he wrote to his daughter:

At Clifton on Monday night we had a contagion of fainting; and yet the place was not hot. I should think we had from a dozen to twenty ladies taken out stiff and rigid, at various times! It became quite ridiculous.

v

We leave Bristol by the same road as the Pickwickians travelled in so boisterous a manner to Birmingham, as described on page 91, and reach Berkeley Heath in 18 miles and notice the Bell Inn, an unpretentious roadside hostelry, announcing on its signboard that "Charles Dickens and Party lunched here 1827," which of course is not a fact; it was however a party of Charles Dickens's characters who lunched there as recorded in the *Pickwick Papers* when on this very momentous journey, one of Bob Sawyer's funny stories "was only stopped by the stoppage of the chaise at the Bell at Berkeley Heath, to change horses."

"I say! We're going to dine here, aren't we?" said Bob, looking in at the window.

"Dine!" said Mr. Pickwick. "Why, we have only come nineteen miles, and have eighty-seven and a half to go."

"Just the reason why we should take something to enable us to bear up against the fatigue" remonstrated Mr. Bob Sawyer.

Mr. Pickwick was somewhat out in the distance still to be covered to Birmingham, it being only 66 and not 87½ miles as he states. In answer to Bob, Mr. Pickwick declared it was "Quite impossible to dine at half past eleven o'clock."

"So it is" rejoined Bob, "lunch is the very thing. Hallo, you sir! Lunch for three, directly, and keep the horses back for a quarter of an hour. Tell them to put everything they have cold on the table, and some bottled ale, and let us taste your very best Madeira."

Issuing these orders with monstrous importance and bustle, Mr. Bob Sawyer at once hurried into the house to superintend the arrangements; in less than five minutes he returned and declared them to be excellent.

The quality of the lunch fully justified the eulogium which Bob had pronounced, and very great justice was done to it, not only by that gentleman, but Mr. Ben Allen and Mr. Pickwick also. Under the auspices of the three, the bottled ale and the Madeira were promptly disposed of; and when (the horses being once more put to) they resumed their seats, with the case-bottle full of the best substitute for milk-punch that could be procured on so short a notice, the key-bugle sounded, and the red flag waved, without the slightest opposition on Mr. Pickwick's part.

It is a pity that so fine and ancient a city as Gloucester should have no association with Dickens. The Pickwickians must have passed through it on this journey to Birmingham, but perhaps it was the "substitute for milk-punch" with which the case-bottle was filled that made them oblivious to its existence.

Gloucester, however, is a very good centre from which to visit the remaining places of interest to the Dickens pilgrim in the West.

The next stopping-place of the Pickwickians was Tewkesbury, ten miles from Gloucester, and here the Hop Pole still flourishes.

At the Hop Pole at Tewkesbury, they stopped to dine: upon which occasion there was more bottled ale, with some more Madeira, and some port besides; and here the case-bottle was replenished for the fourth time. Under the influence of these combined stimulants, Mr. Pickwick and Mr. Ben Allen fell fast asleep for thirty miles, while Bob and Sam Weller sang duets in the dickey.

The first reference to Cheltenham is in *Nicholas Nickleby* when Miss Knag tells Madame Mantalini that she "had an uncle once, who lived in Cheltenham, and had a most excellent business as a tobacconist—hem—who had such small feet, that they were no bigger than those which are usually joined to wooden legs."

There is also a brief mention of Cheltenham in *Little Dorrit*.

Macready the actor went to live in retirement at Cheltenham in the year 1859 ; after Dickens, who was a great friend, visited him there he wrote :

I have rarely seen a place that so attracted my fancy. I had never seen it before. Also I believe the character of its people to have greatly changed for the better. All sorts of long visaged prophets had told me that they were dull, stolid, slow and I don't know what more that is disagreeable. I found them exactly the reverse in all respects.

His first reading at Cheltenham was on October 27th, 1859, just before Macready went there. Dickens gave two readings, one in the afternoon—the other in the evening, both at the Music Hall, Royal Old Wells. The old actor was naturally anxious to hear Dickens read, but it was not for more than two years that he had the opportunity. In October, 1861, we find Dickens writing him :

This is a short note. But the moment I know for certain what is designed for me at Cheltenham, I write to you in order that you may know it from me and not by chance from anyone else.

I am to read there on the evening of Friday, the 3rd of January, and on the morning of Saturday, the 4th ; as I have nothing to do on Thursday, the 2nd, but come from Leamington, I shall come to you, please God, for a quiet dinner that day.

These, and all subsequent readings in Cheltenham, were in the Assembly Rooms, since demolished. The effect this reading had on the famous actor was marvellous. "I swear to Heaven," he said to Dickens "that as a piece of passion and playfulness, indescribably mixed up together it does amaze me as profoundly as it moves me. But as a piece of art, and you know I . . . have seen the best art in a great time, it is incomprehensible to me.".

On Friday evening and Saturday afternoon, March 23rd and 24th, 1866, Dickens again read at Cheltenham. In a letter written shortly before he said : "I am going to read at Cheltenham (on my own account) on the 23rd and 24th of this month, staying with Macready of course."

The following year he read also on the Friday evening and Saturday afternoon, April 5th and 6th.

Macready lived at No. 6 Wellington Square, and although Dickens visited his old friend there, probably on the Saturday

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evenings, it is doubtful if he actually stayed with Macready, as he states. He was always averse to staying with friends on these reading tours, although the readings being actually over on the Saturday afternoon, he may possibly have spent the night and Sunday with Macready. However, in a letter written to Mrs. Fitzgerald on the 7th March, 1867, he explained his decision in this respect, thus :

I never promise myself while thus engaged to make a visit. And even in the case of my old friend Mr. Macready at Cheltenham, a little while ago, I acted on the Spartan principles which at this present writing are making me very uncomfortable.

Dickens's farewell reading in Cheltenham was on Friday, January 22nd, 1869, when he gave the Sikes and Nancy scene specially for Macready. To Forster he wrote : "Macready is of opinion that the Murder is two Macbeths. He declares that he heard every word of the reading, but I doubt it. Alas ! he is sadly infirm."

VII

Ross, the gateway to the beautiful Wye Valley, has a very interesting connection with Dickens. In the hall of the Royal Hotel is a tablet reading as follows :

AT THIS HOTEL
IN SEPTEMBER 1867
CHARLES DICKENS
MET HIS FRIEND AND BIOGRAPHER
JOHN FORSTER AND HERE
DECIDED UPON HIS CELEBRATED
AMERICAN TOUR
1867-8

George Dolby, Dickens's manager for the reading tours, was a native of Ross, and an interesting duel of wits took place at the Royal Hotel. Dolby had lately returned from America and had reported very favourably on the prospects of great success to be derived from a reading tour in the United States.

Forster—whose advice was much cherished by Dickens—was opposed to the idea. He was spending a few weeks at Ross, so Dickens drew up a list of pros and cons, or as he called it "The case in a nutshell," and it was posted to him.

Then Dolby went home to Ross : let us tell the story in Dolby's own language :

I decided to return to my house at Ross, in which town by an odd coincidence, Mr. Forster was staying for the benefit of his health. So arrangements were made for a meeting to take place between us in ten days after my arrival there.

Up to this time, I had only met Mr. Forster at the social gatherings at "Gad's" and at the office ; and, before the interview at his hotel at Ross, had not met him in a business capacity. Being perfectly aware of the intimate relations existing between Mr. Dickens and Mr. Forster, I regarded this interview with considerable anxiety, as, in my opinion, much depended on the view Mr. Forster should take of the matter. This anxiety was not allayed by the discovery that he had in the most unreasonable manner, and without any knowledge of the subject that I could see, made up his mind that the enterprise was *not* to be ; and a red rag could not have made a mad bull more ferocious than the discussion of the clauses in the moderate and business-like "case in a nutshell" made the biographer of the novelist. He had made up *his* mind, and there was an end of the matter. He urged that ever since the Staplehurst accident Mr. Dickens had been in a bad state of health, and that a sea-voyage was the very worst thing in the world for him. . . .

The unreasonableness of these arguments, and the manner in which they were laid down, produced such an unpleasant effect on my mind that I felt relieved when Mr. Forster suggested that there "was no reason why the interview should be prolonged" as he had "fully made up *his* mind that Dickens should *never go to America again.*"

It was with a sense of relief that I heard the hotel waiter announce that luncheon was served, and with a much greater sense of satisfaction that I declined an invitation to partake of that meal, and so ended a most disagreeable colloquy.

As for Forster, his parting assurance was : "I shall write to Dickens by to-night's post, and tell him how fully I am opposed to the idea, and that he must give it up."

Leaving the oracle to his reflections and his lunch, I proceeded at once to the telegraph station, and sent the following telegram to Mr. Dickens : "I can make nothing of Forster; he is utterly unreasonable and impracticable. Come down here and stay at my house, and we will tackle him together."

Mr. Forster had kept his word and had sent his manifesto to Mr. Dickens, who on receipt of it telegraphed to me

that he would come to Ross by the afternoon train, as suggested; but would stay with Forster at the Hotel for fear of wounding his feelings.

I met Mr. Dickens on the arrival of the train, and conducted him to the hotel, leaving him in the care of his friend, Forster, who displayed a considerable amount of chagrin at the action I had taken.

Next morning I learned from Mr. Dickens that Mr. Forster had conducted himself in the same unreasonable manner as before, leaving the matter where it was on the previous day. . . .

When we returned to Mr. Forster he remarked at once, "I see it's of no use for me to say anything further on the subject, for by your faces it is plain you have made up your minds." Being assured that such was the case, he resignedly ordered lunch, and nothing more was said about the matter on that occasion. Later in the day Mr. Dickens returned to London, and then a sudden change came over Mr. Forster's spirit. These good qualities which had endeared him to Mr. Dickens's heart began to manifest themselves, leaving an impression in my mind that the churlishness displayed at our first interview was the outcome of his love and affection for Mr. Dickens and of an anxious desire for his welfare. The objections to the American tour were heard no more; but when Mr. Forster was leaving Ross, he gave me at the railway station a parting injunction to take care of Mr. Dickens, which would have been really comic, but for the earnestness with which it was delivered.

This incident is referred to as follows by Forster in his *Life of Dickens*:

So momentous in my judgment were the consequences of the American journey to him that it seemed right to preface thus much of the inducements and temptations that led to it. My own part in the discussion was that of steady dissuasion throughout: though this might perhaps have been less persistent if I could have reconciled myself to the belief, which I never at any time did, that Public Readings were a worthy employment for a man of his genius. But it had by this time become clear to me that nothing could stay the enterprise. The result of Mr. Dolby's visit to America—drawn up by Dickens himself in a paper possessing still the interest of having given to the Readings when he crossed the Atlantic much of the

form they then assumed—reached me when I was staying at Ross; and upon it was founded my last argument against the scheme. This he received in London on the 28th of September, on which day he thus wrote to his eldest daughter:

“As I telegraphed after I saw you, I am off to Ross to consult with Mr. Forster and Dolby together. You shall hear, either on Monday, or by Monday’s post from London, how I decide finally.”

The result he wrote to her three days later:

“You will have had my telegram that I go to America. After a long discussion with Forster, and consideration of what is to be said on both sides, I have decided to go through with it. We have telegraphed ‘Yes’ to Boston.”

Dolby lived at Ashfield Lodge, Ross, and also at Wilton House, at both of which places he entertained Dickens on more than one occasion. Of the visit paid to Dolby in January, 1869, Dolby tells us: “He had heard so much of the beauties of the scenery in and around Ross, and expressed a wish to be taken for a walk along the prettiest road in the neighbourhood. I chose the one which is supposed by old travellers to be the ‘prettiest in England’ viz., from Ross to Monmouth, about eleven miles.”

VIII

Writing to his sub-editor, W. H. Wills, in April, 1854, who was then spending a holiday in Malvern, Dickens said: “I know all the walks for many and many miles round about Malvern, and delightful walks they are.”

This knowledge came from a stay at Knutsford Lodge, Malvern, in 1851, when Dickens took lodgings there for his wife and little daughter, Dora Annie, who were both ailing, and the air of Malvern had been recommended to him. Dickens divided his time between London and Malvern, and on March 15th wrote to Forster:

It is a most beautiful place. O Heaven, to meet the Cold Waterers (as I did this morning when I went out for a shower-bath) dashing down the hills, with severe expressions on their countenances, like men doing matches and not exactly winning! Then, a young lady in a grey polka going *up* the hills, regardless of legs; and meeting a young gentleman (a bad case I should say) with a light black silk cap on under his hat, and the pimples of I don’t know how many douches under that. Likewise an old man

who ran over a milk-child, rather than stop!—with no neckcloth, on principle; and with his mouth wide open to catch the morning air.

The visit however was fraught with anxiety. Towards the end of March Dickens was summoned to London to attend the deathbed of his father, whom he saw buried at Highgate on April 5th, and then hurried back to his ailing wife and child at Malvern. For the 14th April he was booked to take the chair at the dinner of the General Theatrical Fund. He was playing with his little daughter just prior to leaving Malvern. His departure was fixed as late as possible, and Forster tells us that “the train from Malvern brought him up only five minutes short of the hour appointed for the dinner” and adds that he “never heard him to greater advantage than in the speech that followed.” But it was a night of tragedy. Forster thus records it:

“Half an hour before he rose to speak I had been called out of the room. It was the servant from Devonshire Terrace to tell me his child Dora was suddenly dead. She had not been strong from her birth; but there was just at this time no cause for special fears when unexpected convulsions came, and the frail little life passed away. My decision had to be formed at once; and I satisfied myself that it would be best to permit his part of the proceedings to close before the truth was told to him. But as he went on, after the sentences I have quoted, to speak of actors having to come from scenes of sickness, of suffering, aye, even of death itself, to play their parts before us, my part was very difficult. “Yet how often is it with all of us,” he proceeded to say, and I remember to this hour with what anguish I listened to words that had for myself alone, in all the crowded room, their full significance: “how often is it with all of us, that in our several spheres we have to do violence to our feelings, and to hide our hearts in carrying on this fight of life; if we would bravely discharge in it our duties and responsibilities.” In the disclosure that followed when he left the chair, Mr. Lemon, who was present, assisted me; and I left this good friend with him next day, when I went myself to Malvern and brought back Mrs. Dickens and her sister. The little child lies in a grave at Highgate near that of Mr. and Mrs. John Dickens; and on the stone which covers her is now written also her father’s name, and those of two of her brothers.”

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Mr. Nightingale's Diary, a farce written by Dickens in conjunction with Mark Lemon, and first produced at Devonshire House on May 27th, 1851, has its scene laid in Malvern, at the Water Lily Hotel. This would suggest that it was at Malvern that the farce was written, during the above mentioned visit.

Dickens was at Worcester in 1858, when he gave a reading there on August 10th. He does not appear to have visited the city on any of the subsequent reading tours.

Dickens appears to have visited only two towns in South Wales on his reading tours.

The first was on April 4th, 1867, when he was at Swansea and read *Doctor Marigold* and *The Trial* from *Pickwick* at the Music Hall, later known as The Albert Hall, and now a cinema.

This was his only visit to Swansea.

On Thursday January 21st, 1869, Dickens read in Newport, at the old Victorian Assembly Rooms, which were burnt down soon after, the present Lyceum Theatre being erected on its site.

On this occasion he stayed at the King's Head Hotel, now no more.

CHAPTER SIX

INTO THE WEST

I

THIS journey to the west—farther west than we have gone on the Bath road dealt with in the last chapter—takes us into Cornwall and as far as Land's End.

For the first ten miles, until Hounslow is reached, our road is the same as the Bath road; but at Hounslow we bear to the left along the main road to Exeter, through Bagshot and Basingstoke.

At Andover, sixty-three miles from London, two roads branch off to Exeter, both joining again at Honiton, one via Amesbury and Stonehenge, the other via Salisbury. Both these interest us in exploring the Dickens Land of the West, as in the pages of *Martin Chuzzlewit* we are often taken to the home of Mr. Pecksniff which was situated at a distance of about ten miles from "the fair old town of Salisbury."

There are many accounts of the coach ride between Mr. Pecksniff's and London, as the characters in the book are constantly moving between Wiltshire and the Metropolis.

First, Pecksniff and his daughters perform the journey by "the heavy coach," Pecksniff sleeping for the "first three stages" and then being joined by Jonas and his father, who after the visit to old Martin at the Green Dragon, had done some business at a place on the road back to London. This may have been Andover or Basingstoke, and near Andover it is that Martin probably stopped to breakfast on the morning of his departure from Mr. Pecksniff's house.

He was ten good miles from the village made illustrious by being the abiding-place of Mr. Pecksniff, when he stopped to breakfast at a little road-side ale-house; and resting upon a high-backed settle before the fire, pulled off his coat, and hung it before the cheerful blaze to dry. It was a very different place from the last tavern in which

he had regaled; boasting no greater extent of accommodation than the brick-floored kitchen yielded.

Here Martin had the good luck to fall in with the driver of "a kind of light van drawn by four horses," who for the silk handkerchief Martin wore, agreed to take him as far as he went—"Hounslow, ten miles this side of London."

After Jonas had buried his father, we find him accompanying Pecksniff on this road, "seated on the outside of the coach at the back," and enquiring as to the dowries that might be given with his daughters.

Mr. Pecksniff unburdened himself at this, and Jonas became taciturn for a time, being "steadily engaged in subjecting some given amount to the operation of every known rule in figures," then became jocose and slapped his companion on the back, saying, "Let's have something." Pecksniff consenting,

Jonas got down from the coach-top with great alacrity, cut a cumbersome kind of caper in the road. After which, he went into the public-house, and there ordered spirituous drink to such an extent, that Mr. Pecksniff had some doubts of his perfect sanity, until Jonas set them quite at rest by saying, when the coach could wait no longer:

"I've been standing treat for a whole week and more, and letting you have all the delicacies of the season. *You* shall pay for this, Pecksniff." It was not a joke either, as Mr. Pecksniff at first supposed; for he went off to the coach without further ceremony, and left his respected victim to settle the bill.

Pecksniff, being a man of much endurance and having a great regard for Jonas "came out from the tavern with a smiling face, and even went as far as to repeat the performance, on a less expensive scale, at the next ale-house."

None of these landmarks of the road are mentioned by name, because Dickens was not very familiar with the Salisbury road. Indeed the names of the places en route are entirely absent. There is only one inn that is mentioned by name, the Bald Faced Stag, but there is no such inn on the road. Its name figures in connection with Tom Pinch's jovial ride to London, Chapter XXXVI, when Dickens describes the road and the ride, with many a "Yoho," and talks of "scampering on through light and darkness, all the same, as if the light of London, fifty miles away, were quite enough to travel by and some to spare."

Somewhere about Overton might be this spot, fifty miles from London.

Yoho, beside the village green where cricket players linger yet, . . . away with four fresh horses from the Bald Faced Stag where topers congregate about the door admiring.

There are two scenes connected with the road between Salisbury and London that stand out above all the rest; the coach ride of Tom Pinch, above referred to, and the account of "the enterprise of Mr. Jonas and his friend" which concludes in Chapter XLVII.

The first stage of this enterprise is described in Chapter XLII when Jonas and Tigg set out for Mr. Pecksniff's on the night of the terrible storm.

They were clear of London, or as clear of it as travellers can be whose way lies on the Western Road, within a stage of that enormous city. Occasionally they encountered a foot passenger, hurrying to the nearest place of shelter; or some unwieldy cart proceeding onward at a heavy trot; with the same end in view. Little clusters of such vehicles were gathered round the stableyard or baiting-place of every wayside tavern.

Tigg Montague expressed the wish that they "had never started on this journey . . . this is not the night to travel in." To which Jonas retorted, "If you hadn't kept me waiting all day, we might have been at Salisbury by this time; snug abed and fast asleep."

In the last stage of their journey and about three or four miles this side of Salisbury, the accident happened to the carriage which gave Jonas the opportunity—in which he was not successful—of endeavouring to bring the wheels of the carriage over the prostrate body of Tigg. As the post-boy observed,

"If ever you're in an accident of this sort again, sir, which I hope you won't be; never you pull at the bridle of a horse that's down, when there's a man's head in the way. That can't be done twice without there being a dead man in the case."

The result of this first stage of the "enterprise" was that, "Mr. Pecksniff agreed to become the last partner and proprietor in the Anglo-Bengalee, and made an appointment

to dine with Mr. Montague, at Salisbury, on the next day but one, then and there to complete the negotiation."

This suited Jonas admirably; he took leave of Montague Tigg and returned to London, there to adopt a disguise and immediately make for Wiltshire again:

He shaped his course for the main road, and soon reached it; riding a part of the way, then alighting and walking on again. He travelled for a considerable distance upon the roof of a stage-coach, which came up while he was afoot; and when it turned out of his road, bribed the driver of a return postchaise to take him on with him; and then made across the country at a run, and saved a mile or two before he stuck again into the road. At last, as his plan was, he came up with a certain lumbering, slow, night-coach, which stopped wherever it could, and was stopping then at a public house, while the guard and coachman ate and drank within. He bargained for a seat outside this coach and took it.

He got down "short o' the town" of Salisbury and in a copse two or three miles off "tore out from a fence a thick, hard, knotted stake," and then "hung about the inn yard" while Pecksniff and Tigg were having their promised dinner at Salisbury.

The dinner over, Tigg accompanied Pecksniff part of the way home "meaning to return by a pleasant track which Mr. Pecksniff had engaged to show him through some fields." At a stile they stopped. "This is the place my dear sir," said Pecksniff. "Keep the path and go straight through the little wood you'll come to. The path is narrow there but you can't miss it."

He took the footpath. The glory of the departing sun was on his face. The music of the birds was in his ears. Sweet wild flowers bloomed about him. Thatched roofs of poor men's houses were in the distance; and an old grey spire, surmounted by a Cross, rose up between him and the coming night.

This was the Cathedral.

In beautiful and touching words Dickens paints the picture of this man going to his doom; we can see the crafty face of Jonas watching for his prey; we can see him grip the tighter the knotted stake he had forced from the fence a few hours before:

As the sunlight died away, and evening fell upon the wood, he entered it. Moving here and there a bramble or a drooping bough which stretched across his path, he slowly disappeared. At intervals a narrow opening showed him passing on, or the sharp cracking of some tender branch denoted where he went; then he was seen or heard no more.

Never more beheld by mortal eye or heard by mortal ear; one man excepted. That man, parting the leaves and branches on the other side, near where the path emerged again, came leaping out soon afterwards.

This is a chapter that grips us, and makes the woods round Salisbury live in our minds for ever more.

“Leaving the body of the murdered man in one thick solitary spot . . . among the last year’s leaves of oak and beech, just as it had fallen headlong down,” Jonas walked on for ten miles; and then stopped at an ale-house for a coach, which he knew would pass through, on its way to London, before long; and which he also knew was not the coach he had travelled down by, for it came from another place. And “when the coach came up, which it soon did, he got a place outside, and was carried briskly onward towards home” where Nemesis overtook him at the hands of Nadgett.

II

The “little Wiltshire village, within an easy journey of the fair old town of Salisbury” where Mr. Pecksniff was guide, philosopher and friend to budding architects, is not named by Dickens but it is usually referred to as being the village of Amesbury, eight miles north from Salisbury; although there are others who claim this distinction for Alderbury which is only three miles south-east from Salisbury, and actually possesses a Dragon Inn—a Green one it is true, nevertheless. However, the fact is that the village and the inn formed a composite picture such as Dickens often drew when he was not on very familiar ground.

A little over ten miles beyond Andover and seven miles before reaching Salisbury, just after passing Lobcombe Corner, where the roads from Andover and Stockbridge join, is the Pheasant Inn, better known as Winterslow Hut. It is on record that Dickens “explored” this association with Hazlitt in 1848—five years after writing *Martin Chuzzlewit*. He had visited the district before writing the book,

as we point out on page 114, and may have walked the "couple of miles or so" into Winterslow, where the Lion's Head may have attracted his fancy and in course of time and travel, become the Blue Dragon that was kept by Mrs. Lupin.

Winterslow fits in with the details given by Dickens even better than Amesbury, as the village where Pecksniff resided.

It is "a couple of miles or so" away from the main London road as required by Chapter XX, and eight miles from Salisbury, against the ten miles called for in Chapter XXXI, but in this respect Amesbury is eight miles too.

The toll gate of which Dickens speaks in connection with Tom Pinch and his love for the tollman's children, we can well imagine was at this corner.

The tollman—a crusty customer, always smoking solitary pipes in a Windsor chair, inside, set artfully between two little windows that looked up and down the road, so that when he saw anything coming up, he might hug himself on having toll to take, and when he saw it going down, might hug himself on having taken it.

The finger-post at the end of the lane leading to the village is often mentioned, for here the coach always stopped and the gig was sometimes in waiting. On the occasion of Mrs. Lupin meeting the coach there with Tom Pinch's box, and handing it over to him with "a basket, with a long bottle sticking out of it" for his refreshment on the way, having said good-bye to the kindly landlady, Tom strains his eyes and thinks to himself, "And that's the last of the old finger-post where I have so often stood to see this very coach go by, and where I have parted with so many companions! I used to compare this coach with some great monster that appeared at certain times to bear my friends away into the world. And now it's bearing me away, to seek my fortune, Heaven knows where and how!"

It made Tom melancholy to picture himself walking up the lane and back to Pecksniff's as of old.

The toll-house and the finger-post all fit in so well with the various parties going between the Pecksniffs and London or Salisbury, that it is far easier to visualise it at Winterslow than it is from Amesbury.

As we have said, Mr. Pecksniff's village was one of Dickens's composite pictures, and we cannot for one moment believe he had Amesbury in his mind, more than any other place.

A careful reading of the account of the ride of Tom Pinch to London after being the victim of a duty which Mr.

Pecksniff owed to society, shakes the theory of Amesbury as the village of the Blue Dragon. Tom announces, “‘I shall walk to Salisbury to-night’ . . . for ten long miles he plodded on wet through, until at last the lights appeared and he came into the welcome precincts of the city.”

His box he left at the Dragon with Mrs. Lupin—quite uncertain of his ultimate destination; and it was only on the persuasion of his friend at Salisbury, the organist’s assistant, that “whatever Tom did, he must go to London for there was no place like it” that he decided on the journey.

That day’s coach being full “he was obliged to postpone his departure until the next night” and he accordingly wrote to Mrs. Lupin “appointing his box to be brought to the old finger-post at the old time.”

Thus, if Amesbury is the village of the Blue Dragon, Dickens made the Salisbury-London coach travel via Amesbury, whereas, as a fact, the coaches that ran through Amesbury to Exeter, did not touch Salisbury at all!

In Chapter XLII., describing the journey of Jonas and Tigg from London to Pecksniff’s house, we find another clue which shakes the claims of Amesbury:

They agreed that they would go to Salisbury, and would cross to Mr. Pecksniff’s in the morning; and at the prospect of deluding that worthy gentleman, the spirits of his amiable son-in-law became more boisterous than ever.

If Mr. Pecksniff lived at Amesbury, they would have had no need to go to Salisbury first as there was a direct road and a direct coach service to that village without going out of the way, and via Salisbury, to get to it.

Winterslow church, in company with that at Amesbury, has no spire, such as Dickens gives to it in the second chapter of the story.

The vane upon the tapering spire of the old church glistened from its lofty station in sympathy with the general gladness; and from the ivy-shaded windows such gleams of light shone back upon the glowing sky, that it seemed as if the quiet buildings were the hoarding-place of twenty summers, and all their ruddiness and warmth were stored within.

We should imagine Dickens was confusing this with the spire of Salisbury to which curiously enough he alludes in chapter twelve as “towers.” The church figures prominently in the book as the one in which Tom Pinch played for nothing

"the sweetest little organ ever heard" and notably on one day when "Mr. Pecksniff being out walking by himself, took it into his head to stray into the churchyard. As he was lingering among the tombstones, endeavouring to extract an available sentiment or two from the epitaphs—for he never lost an opportunity of making a few moral crackers, to be let off as occasion served—Tom Pinch began to practise. Tom could run down to the church and do so whenever he had time to spare; for it was a simple little organ, provided with wind by the action of the musician's feet: and he was independent, even of a bellows-blower."

It was on this occasion that Mary Graham had her conversation with Tom Pinch, in which he denounced Pecksniff who, overhearing it from his pew, later took the opportunity of "doing his duty to society" and parting company with Tom Pinch.

III

Tom Pinch had "a shrewd notion that Salisbury was a very desperate sort of place; an exceeding wild and dissipated city"; so when, in Chapter V, he took Mr. Pecksniff's raw-boned horse and hooded vehicle, "more like a gig with a tumour than anything else," into Salisbury to meet young Martin Chuzzlewit, we are told that, after he had put up the horse "he set forth on a stroll about the streets with a vague and not unpleasant idea that they teemed with all kinds of mystery and bedevilment." It was market-day, and

The thoroughfares about the market-place being filled with carts, horses, donkeys, baskets, waggons, garden-stuff, meat, tripe, pies, poultry and huckster's wares of every opposite description and possible variety of character. Then there were young farmers and old farmers, with smock-frocks, brown great-coats, drab great-coats, red worsted comforters, feather-leggings, wonderful shaped hats, hunting-whips, and rough sticks, standing about in groups, or talking noisily together on the tavern steps, or paying and receiving huge amounts of greasy wealth, with the assistance of such bulky pocket-books that when they were in their pockets it was apoplexy to get them out, and when they were out it was spasms to get them in again. Also there were farmers' wives in beaver bonnets and red cloaks, riding shaggy horses purged of all earthly passions, who went soberly into all manner of places without desiring

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to know why, and who, if required, would have stood stock still in a china-shop, with a complete dinner-service at each hoof.

We too, if it is market-day or not, can enjoy to the full the quaint narrow streets of Salisbury, and the old market-place with its picturesque butter cross, with quite as much interest as Tom Pinch, who "When he had exhausted the market-place, and watched the farmers safe into the market dinner, wandered round the town and regaled himself with the shop windows; previously taking a long stare at the bank, and wondering in what direction underground the caverns might be, where they kept the money."

The tavern at which Tom Pinch was to meet Martin is not named; there are so many of the smaller type of inn in Salisbury that it is idle to conjecture which of them was the actual place where Tom Pinch sat "in the sanded parlour of the tavern where he had left the horse" and had "his little table drawn out close before the fire and fell to work upon a well-cooked steak and smoking hot potatoes, with a strong appreciation of their excellence, and a very keen sense of enjoyment." But the Haunch of Venison in the market-place is a typical example of such an inn.

There is no further description of the inn until Chapter XXXI when Tom, after his dismissal from Mr. Pecksniff, made for Salisbury and plodded the ten miles through the wet and eventually "came into the welcome precincts of the city."

He went to the inn where he had waited for Martin and . . . ordered a bed. He had no heart for tea or supper . . . but sat by himself before an empty table in the public room. . . . It was a great relief when the chambermaid came in, and said the bed was ready. It was a low four-poster shelving downward in the centre like a trough, and the room was crowded with impracticable tables and exploded chests of drawers, full of damp linen. A graphic representation in oil of a remarkably fat ox hung over the fireplace, and the portrait of some former landlord (who might have been the ox's brother, he was so like him) stared roundly in, at the foot of the bed. A variety of queer smells were partially quenched in the prevailing scent of very old lavender; and the window had not been opened for such a long space of time that it pleaded immemorial usage, and wouldn't come open now.

The other inn at Salisbury is perhaps more easily identified. Here John Westlock, who had had the satisfaction of seeing his "father's executors cash up" redeemed his promise to Tom Pinch to "come down to Salisbury on purpose" to give him a dinner in honour of the event. His invitation included Martin, and was for dinner, as Tom said, "not at the house where you and I were either, but at the very first hotel in the town."

This could only have been the White Hart Hotel, which to-day is a capital example of an English hotel.

We can also well imagine it was to the White Hart that the wounded Tigg and Jonas came on the night of their disastrous ride from London, and knocked the people up there to send out messengers to see to the overturned carriage and the half dead Bailey Junior. It was also quite probable that Pecksniff and Tigg dined here a few days later, on that fateful evening that was to be Tigg's last. Pecksniff had fallen into the trap and had "agreed to become the last partner and proprietor in the Anglo-Bengalee, and made an appointment to dine with Mr. Montague at Salisbury, on the next day but one, and there to complete the negotiations."

A spirited account of the walk of Martin and Tom from Amesbury to Salisbury, ending at this inn, is given in Chapter XII. "A rare strong, hearty, healthy walk—four statute miles an hour—preferable to that rumbling, tumbling, jolting, shaking, scraping, creaking, villainous old gig? Why, the two things will not admit of comparison. It is an insult to the walk, to set them side by side."

The journey ended in a snowstorm "And lo! the towers of the Old Cathedral rise before them, even now! and bye and bye they come into the sheltered streets, made strangely silent by their white carpet; and so to the Inn for which they are bound."

A famous Inn! the hall a very grove of dead game, and dangling joints of mutton; and in one corner an illustrious larder, with glass doors, developing cold fowls and noble joints, and tarts wherein the raspberry jam coyly withdrew itself, as such a precious creature should, behind a lattice work of pastry. And behold, on the first floor, at the court-end of the house, in a room with all the window-curtains drawn, a fire piled half-way up the chimney, plates warming before it, wax candles gleaming everywhere and a table spread for three, with silver and glass enough for thirty—John Westlock!

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When Tom's dream of Pecksniff was shattered, what a difference it made to him of his aspect of the town the following morning!

He possessed the same faith in the wonderful shops, the same intensified appreciation of the mystery and wickedness of the place; and made the same exalted estimate of its wealth, population, and resources; and yet it was not the old city nor anything like it. He walked into the market while they were getting breakfast ready for him at the Inn; and though it was the same market as of old, crowded by the same buyers and sellers; brisk with the same business; noisy with the same confusion of tongues and cluttering of fowls in coops . . . still it was strangely changed to Tom. For, in the centre of the market-place, he missed a statue he had set up there, as in all other places of his personal resort; and it looked cold and bare without that ornament.

Naturally the graceful and venerable Cathedral at Salisbury is often referred to in the story.

One of the methods of tuition adopted by Mr. Pecksniff for his pupils was for them to make "elevations of Salisbury Cathedral from every possible point of sight" we are informed in Chapter II. In a later Chapter (XLIV) the great architect who "had never designed or built anything" thus expands to Jonas Chuzzlewit, on the venerable edifice:

"Salisbury Cathedral, my dear Jonas, is an edifice replete with venerable associations, and strikingly suggestive of the loftiest emotions. It is here we contemplate the work of bygone ages. It is here we listen to the swelling organ, as we stroll through the reverberating aisles. We have drawings of this celebrated structure from the North, from the South, from the East, from the West, from the South-East, from the Nor'-West—"

In Chapter XII, Dickens makes a curious blunder, as in the account of the walk of Tom and Martin into Salisbury to meet John Westlock, he says "And lo! the towers of the old Cathedral rise before them." The beauty of the *spire* of Salisbury must surely have left its impress on Dickens's mind, and seeing that he visited Salisbury after the book was published, it is not a little curious that the error was not corrected in the later edition which he stated to have personally revised. The spire of the Cathedral is however not forgotten in a later chapter, just prior to the savage murder

of Tigg by Jonas, when the former took the footpath into the wood and the "old grey spire, surmounted by a Cross, rose up between him and the coming night."

Only once are we introduced to the interior of the Cathedral, and this was on the occasion when Tom Pinch went to meet Martin at Salisbury ; he was busily reading the play bill of the theatre and listening to the instructions given to a boy by one of the actors "a sallow gentleman with long dark hair" to fetch his broadsword from his lodgings when he was recalled to everyday life by the old Cathedral bell ringing for vespers services, and he tore himself away to the organ loft, to operate the stops for his friend, the organist's assistant; and when the service was over, Tom took the organ himself.

It was then turning dark, and the yellow light that streamed in through the ancient windows in the choir was mingled with a lurky red. As the grand tones resounded through the church, they seemed, to Tom, to find an echo in the depth of every ancient tomb, no less than in the deep mystery of his own heart. . . . The feeling that the sounds awakened, in the moment of their existence, seemed to include his whole life and being; and as the surrounding realities of stone and wood and glass grew dimmer in the darkness, these visions grew so much the brighter that Tom might . . . have sat there pouring out his grateful heart till midnight, but for a very earthy old verger insisting on locking up the Cathedral forthwith.

The last glimpse of Salisbury is given in the chapter devoted to Tom Pinch's ride to London.

"When the coach came round at last, with 'London' blazoned in letters of gold upon the boot" Tom was half inclined to run away. But he didn't, and took his seat upon the box next the resplendent coachman.

Such a coachman, and such a guard, never could have existed between Salisbury and any other place. The coach was none of your steady-going, yokel coaches, but a swaggering, rakish, dissipated London coach; . . . It cared no more for Salisbury than if it had been a hamlet. It rattled noisily through the best streets, defied the Cathedral, took the worst corners sharpest, went cutting in everywhere, making everything get out of its way; and spun along the open country road, blowing a lively defiance out of its key-bugle, as its last glad parting legacy.

From Salisbury it is eight miles to Amesbury, from which Salisbury Plain and Stonehenge are best visited, and the journey continued to Exeter by way of Wincanton and Honiton.

Dickens's thoughts had apparently been on Salisbury Plain whilst in America the year previous to writing *Martin Chuzzlewit*, for in a letter to Forster at that time, he compared the Wild West very unfavourably with it.

The widely-famed Far West is not to be compared with even the tamest portions of Scotland or Wales. You stand upon the prairie, and see the unbroken horizon all round you. You are on a great plain, which is like a sea without water. I am exceedingly fond of wild and lonely scenery, and believe that I have the faculty of being as much impressed by it as any man living. But the prairie fell, by far, short of my preconceived idea. I felt no such emotions as I do in crossing Salisbury Plain. The excessive flatness of the scene makes it dreary, but tame. Grandeur is certainly not its characteristic. . . . It was fine. It was worth the ride. . . . But to say (as the fashion is here) that the sight is a landmark in one's existence, and awakens a new set of sensations, is sheer gammon. I would say to every man who can't see a prairie—go to Salisbury Plain, Marlborough Downs, or any of the broad, high, open lands near the sea. Many of them are fully as impressive; and Salisbury Plain is decidedly more so.

No doubt his knowledge of the district was obtained in the newspaper reporting days, when he travelled this way by coach to report the speeches of Lord John Russell on his election campaign in the West. We have no direct record of a visit until 1848—five years after *Martin Chuzzlewit*, when Forster tells us that "One of its earlier months had been signalised by an adventure in which Leech, Lemon, and myself took part with him, when, obtaining horses from Salisbury, we passed the whole of a March day in riding over every part of the Plain; visiting Stonehenge, and exploring Hazlitt's 'hut' at Winterslow, birthplace of some of his finest essays."

In the opening chapter of *The Uncommercial Traveller* Dickens refers to himself as "quite a Druid, in the midst of a light Stonehenge of samples."

And in *The Holy Tree* he refers to "a good Inn down

in Wiltshire" where he put up once. It was, we read, "on the skirts of Salisbury Plain, and the midnight wind that rattled my lattice window came moaning at me from Stonehenge."

There is a more marked reference to Stonehenge, in the same story, where Dickens tells us:

There was a hanger-on at that establishment . . . with long white hair, and flinty blue eyes always looking afar off; who claimed to have been a shepherd, and who seemed to be ever watching for the reappearance, on the verge of the horizon, of some ghostly flock of sheep that had been mutton for many ages. He was a man with a weird belief in him that no one could count the stones of Stonehenge twice, and make the same number of them; likewise, that any one who counted them three times nine times, and then stood in the centre and said "I dare!" would behold a tremendous apparition, and be stricken dead.

The George at Amesbury is usually referred to as being the Blue Dragon of *Martin Chuzzlewit*, but the objection to it is that it can hardly be considered as "a village ale-house"; whereas such a title might be applied to the Lion's Head at Winterslow or the Green Dragon at Alderbury, but on the other hand, neither would hardly have been able to accommodate old Martin and Mary, to say nothing of the other members of the Chuzzlewit family who "formally invested it." These remarks only serve to emphasise the fact that a composite picture was drawn by Dickens.

The sign of the Blue Dragon is said to be applicable to the sign of the Green Dragon at Alderbury as it was many years ago. Dickens refers to it as:

A certain Dragon who swung and creaked complainingly before the village ale-house door. A faded and an ancient dragon he was; and many a wintry storm of rain, snow, sleet and hail, had changed his colour from a gaudy blue to a faint lack-lustre shade of grey. But there he hung; rearing in a state of monstrous imbecility, on his hind legs; waxing, with every month that passed, so much more dim and shapeless that as you gazed at him on one side of the signboard it seemed as if he must be gradually melting through it, and coming out upon the other.

At a later date it will be remembered, the sign was changed to The Jolly Tapley, consequent upon the redoubtable Mark Tapley marrying the kindly, buxom Mrs. Lupin.

If the George at Amesbury is the Blue Dragon, then possibly the King's Arms is the original of the Half Moon and Seven Stars, where Montague Tigg announced he was to be found "at any time, and open to any reasonable proposition" in regard to the common enemy, old Martin Chuzzlewit. Anthony Chuzzlewit and his son Jonas were also "economically quartered at the Half Moon and Seven Stars, which was an obscure ale-house."

Snowden Ward, in "The Real Dickens Land," went so far as to locate a house on the left hand side of the Wilsford Road, entering Amesbury, just before the cross road, as the original of the house of Pecksniff.

"In one sense, and only one, he may be said to have been a Land Surveyor on a pretty large scale, as an extensive prospect lay stretched out before the windows of his house."

This may have been the late Mr. Ward's only reason for the identification: we have been unable to find any other support for it.

v

Sherborne, ten miles south from Wincanton on the main Salisbury-Exeter Road, was the place of Macready's retirement in 1851, and there is no doubt that Dickens paid him more than one visit there.

However, it is on record that on December 21st, 1854, Dickens gave one of his earliest public readings there, for the benefit of the funds of the local Literary Institution, which, as he wrote to Mrs. Watson at the time, "is one of the remaining pleasures of Macready's life."

To Macready himself he had written previously a characteristically humorous letter:

In that vast hall in the busy town of Sherborne, in which our industrious English novelist is expected to read next month—though he is strongly of opinion that he is deficient in power, and too old—I wonder what accommodation there is for reading, because our illustrious countryman likes to stand at a desk breast high, with plenty of room about him, a sloping top, and a ledge to keep his book from tumbling off. If such a thing should not be there, however, on his arrival, I suppose even a Sherborne carpenter could knock it up out of a deal board.

The reading took place in the Literary Society's rooms, later known as the Macready Institute but now an auction

room. This adjoins Sherborne House, where Macready resided.

There is another Dorsetshire village about eight miles from Dorchester that Dickens must have heard of long before Macready made Sherborne the place of his retirement. It is a village six or seven miles from the nearest railway station. In *The Old Curiosity Shop* we read that Dick Swiveller was "the nephew of Rebecca Swiveller, Spinster, deceased, of Cheselbourne in Dorsetshire"; it was this lady who left him an annuity of £150, which enabled him to marry the Marchioness and live in comfort in a cottage in Hampstead.

Taunton is mentioned more than once by Dickens in his novels. In *Nicholas Nickleby* we are told by Mrs. Nickleby that when she was a girl at school she "always went at least twice every year to the Hawkinesses at Taunton Vale" and in *Bleak House*, Conversation Vholes often referred to the privilege he had in supporting "an aged father in the Vale of Taunton—his native place" and he further added on one occasion that he admired that county very much.

In "The Story of Richard Doubledick" the mother of Captain Taunton lived at Frome, in Somersetshire, where she was visited by Doubledick.

VI

Exeter must be given premier honours of all Devon and Cornish towns in matters of association with Dickens. Before his days of authorship commenced Dickens came to Exeter as a reporter (1834). At the annual dinner of the Newspaper Press Fund in 1865 he narrated his experiences during this visit:

The very last time I was in Exeter I strolled into the Castle Yard, there to identify, for the amusement of a friend, the spot on which I once "took," as we used to call it, an election speech of Lord John Russell . . . in the midst of a lively fight maintained by all the vagabonds in that division of the county, and under such pelting rain that I remember two good-natured colleagues, who chanced to be at leisure, held a pocket handkerchief over my notebook, after the manner of a State canopy in an ecclesiastical procession.

In 1839 he again came to the city, this time to find a house for the settlement of his parents. This he succeeded in accomplishing, and for many years John Dickens dwelt

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at Mile End Cottage, Alphington, near Exeter. Dickens loved the place and its neighbourhood and people. He describes this visit thus, in a letter to Forster, dated from New London Inn, Exeter, 5th March, 1839.

"I took a little house for them this morning and if they are not pleased with it I shall be grievously disappointed. Exactly a mile beyond the city on the Plymouth road there are two white cottages: one is theirs and the other belongs to their landlady. I almost forget the number of rooms; but there is an excellent parlour with two other rooms on the ground-floor; there is really a beautiful little room over the parlour which I am furnishing as a drawing-room, and there is a splendid garden. The paint and paper throughout are new and fresh and cheerful-looking, the place is clean beyond all description, and the neighbourhood I suppose the most beautiful in this most beautiful of English counties. Of the landlady, a Devonshire widow with whom I had the honour of taking lunch to-day, I must make most especial mention. She is a fat, infirm, splendidly fresh-faced country dame, rising sixty and recovering from an attack 'on the nerves'—I thought they never went off the stones, but I find they try country air with the best of us. In the event of my mother's being ill at any time, I really think the vicinity of this good dame, the very picture of respectability and good humour, will be the greatest possible comfort. *Her* furniture and domestic arrangements are a capital picture, but that I reserve till I see you, when I anticipate a hearty laugh. She bears the highest character with the bankers and the clergyman (who formerly lived in *my* cottage himself), and is a kind-hearted, worthy, capital specimen of the sort of life, or I have no eye for the real and no idea of finding it out.

"This good lady's brother and his wife live in the next nearest cottage, and the brother transacts the good lady's business, the nerves not admitting of her transacting it herself, although they leave her in her debilitated state something sharper than the finest lancet. Now the brother, having coughed all night till he coughed himself into such a perspiration that you might have 'wringed his hair,' according to the asseveration of eye-witnesses, his wife was sent for to negotiate with me; and if you could have seen me sitting in the kitchen with the two old women, endeavouring to make them comprehend that I had no evil

intentions or covert designs, and that I had come down all that way to take some cottage and had *happened* to walk down that road and see that particular one, you would never have forgotten it. Then, to see the servant-girl run backwards and forwards to the sick man, and when the sick man had signed one agreement which I drew up and the old woman instantly put away in a disused tea-caddy, to see the trouble and the number of messages it took before the sick man could be brought to sign another (a duplicate) that we might have one apiece, was one of the richest scraps of genuine drollery I ever saw in all my days. How, when the business was over, we became conversational; how I was facetious, and at the same time virtuous and domestic; how I drank toasts in the beer, and stated on interrogatory that I was a married man and the father of two blessed infants; how the ladies marvelled thereat; how one of the ladies, having been in London, enquired where I lived, and, being told, remembered that Doughty Street and the Foundling Hospital were in the Old Kent Road, which I didn't contradict; all this and a great deal more must make us laugh when I return, as it makes me laugh now to think of. Of my subsequent visit to the upholsterer recommended by the landlady; of the absence of the upholsterer's wife, and the timidity of the upholsterer, fearful of acting in her absence; of my sitting behind a high desk in a little dark shop, calling over the articles in requisition and checking off the prices as the upholsterer exhibited the goods and called them out; of my coming over the upholsterer's daughter with many virtuous endearments, to propitiate the establishment and reduce the bill; of these matters I say nothing either, for the same reason as that just mentioned. The discovery of the cottage I seriously regard as a blessing (not to speak it profanely) upon our efforts in this cause. I had heard nothing from the bank, and walked straight there by some strange impulse, directly after breakfast. I am sure they may be happy there; for if I were older, and my course of activity were run, I am sure I could, with God's blessing, for many and many a year." . . .

The next day he wrote to his friend Mitton :

Perhaps you have heard from Kate that I succeeded yesterday in the very first walk, and took a cottage at a place called Alphington, one mile from Exeter, which contains, on the ground-floor, a good parlour and kitchen,

and above, a full-sized country drawing-room and three bedrooms; in the yard behind, coal-holes, fowl-houses, and meat safes out of number; in the kitchen a neat little range; in the other rooms, good stoves and cupboards; and all for twenty pounds a year, taxes included. There is a good garden at the side well stocked with cabbages, beans, onions, celery, and some flowers. The stock belonging to the landlady (who lives in the adjoining cottage), there was some question whether she was not entitled to half the produce, but I settled the point by paying five shillings, and becoming absolute master of the whole.

I do assure you that I am charmed with the place and the beauty of the country round about, though I have not seen it under very favourable circumstances, for it snowed when I was there this morning, and blew bitterly from the east yesterday. It is really delightful, and when the house is to rights and the furniture all in, I shall be quite sorry to leave it. I have had some few things, second-hand, but I take it seventy pounds will be the mark, even taking this into consideration. I include in that estimate glass and crockery, garden tools, and such like little things. There is a spare bedroom of course. That I have furnished too.

I am on terms of the closest intimacy with Mrs. Samuell, the landlady, and her brother and sister-in-law, who have a little farm hard by . . . and I really think the old woman herself will be a great comfort to my mother. Coals are dear just now—twenty-six shillings a ton. They found me a boy to go two miles out and back again to order some this morning. I was debating in my mind whether I should give him eighteenpence or two shillings, when his fee was announced—twopence!

The house is on the high-road to Plymouth, and, though in the very heart of Devonshire, there is as much long-stage and posting life as you would find in Piccadilly. The situation is charming. Meadows in front, an orchard running parallel to the garden hedge, richly-wooded hills closing in the prospect behind, and, away to the left, before a splended view of the hill on which Exeter is situated, the cathedral towers rising up into the sky in the most picturesque manner possible. I don't think I ever saw so cheerful or pleasant a spot. The drawing-room is nearly, if not quite, as large as the outer room of my old chambers in Furnival's Inn. The paint and paper are



MILF END COTTAGE, ALPHINGTON

Photo by T. H. Howell



DICKENS AND HIS FRIENDS IN CORNWALL

Drawn by W. M. Thackeray

new, and the place clean as the utmost excess of snowy cleanliness can be.

You would laugh if you could see me powdering away with the upholsterer, and endeavouring to bring about all sorts of impracticable reductions and wonderful arrangements. He has by him two second-hand carpets; the important ceremony of trying the same comes off at three this afternoon. I am perpetually going backwards and forwards. It is two miles from here, so I have plenty of exercise, which so occupies me and prevents me being lonely that I stopped at home to read last night, and shall to-night, although the theatre is open. Charles Kean has been the star for the last two evenings. He was stopping in this house, and went away this morning. I have got his sitting-room now, which is smaller and more comfortable than the one I had before.

Mile End Cottage still stands in Alphington on the outskirts of Exeter, but the view of which Dickens writes as being visible from the house is obscured by buildings since erected.

There is no doubt a reference to the cottage in *Nicholas Nickleby*, Mrs. Nickleby speaks of the home of her friends, the Dibabses, as "The beautiful little thatched white house, one storey high, covered all over with ivy and creeping plants, with an exquisite little porch with twining honeysuckle and all sorts of things."

This is identical with the house in Alphington as it used to be, and was undoubtedly inspired by this visit while engaged in writing the story.

He was accompanied by his wife and stayed, as he did on the occasions of his later visits, at the New London Inn. He occupied the sitting-room which had just been vacated by Charles Kean.

My quarters are excellent, and the head-waiter is *such* a waiter! By-the-bye, not the least comical thing that has occurred was the visit of the upholsterer (with some further calculations) since I began this letter. I think they took me here at the New London for the Wonderful Being I am; they were amazingly sedulous; and no doubt they looked for my being visited by the nobility and gentry of the neighbourhood. My first and only visitor came to-night, a ruddy-faced man in faded black, with extracts from a feather-bed all over him; an extraordinary and quite

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miraculously dirty face, a thick stick, and the personal appearance altogether of an amiable bailiff in a green old age. I have not seen the proper waiter since, and more than suspect I shall not recover this blow. He was announced (by the waiter) as 'a person.' I expect my bill every minute. . . .

The waiter is laughing outside the door with another waiter—this is the latest intelligence of my condition. . . .

The theatre is open here, and Charles Kean is to-night playing for his last night. If it had been the 'rig'lar' drama I should have gone, but I was afraid Sir Giles Overreach might upset me, so I stayed away.

Dickens read twice in Exeter, the first time being on August 4th, 1858, on which occasion he wrote to his sister-in-law a grateful acknowledgment of the reception he received:

We had a most wonderful night at Exeter. It is to be regretted that we cannot take the place again on our way back. It was a prodigious cram, and we turned away no end of people. But not only that; I think they were the finest audience I have ever read to. I don't think I ever read, in some respects, so well; and I never beheld anything like the personal affection they poured out upon me at the end. It was a remarkable sight, and I shall always look back upon it with pleasure.

His second and last visit was in 1862.

Exmouth is mentioned in *The Seven Poor Travellers* as the native place of Richard Doubledick, "which he had never been near in his life."

VII

Dickens paid two visits to Torquay during his reading tours of 1862 and 1869; but the town is not mentioned in any of his books. His first reading was on January 8th, 1862, at the Bath Saloons, and he gave a morning reading the following day. He was delighted with the beauty of the place, but the climate was not to his liking. On the day of the reading, he wrote to Miss Hogarth:

I have not seen the room here yet, but imagine it to be very small. Exeter I know, and that is small also. I am very much used up on the whole, and I cannot bear this warm, moist climate. It would kill me very soon.

. . . This is a very pretty place—a compound of Hastings, Tunbridge Wells, and little bits of the hills about Naples, but I met four respirators as I came up from the station and three pale curates without them, who seemed in a bad way.

His next visit was on January 27th, 1869, when he stayed at the Imperial Hotel. Of the town and hotel, he wrote to his daughter:

This place is most beautiful, though colder now than one would expect. The hotel, an immense place, built among picturesque broken rocks out in the blue sea, is quite delicious. There are bright green trees in the garden, and new peas a foot high. Our rooms are en suite, all commanding the sea, and each with two very large plate-glass windows. Everything good and well served.

The reading on this occasion was in the Old Town Hall, of which he had some very hard words to say:

A pantomime was being done last night in the place where I am to read to-night. It is something between a theatre, a circus, a riding-school, a Methodist chapel, and a cowhouse. I was so disgusted with its acoustic properties on going to look at it, that the whole unfortunate staff have been all day, and now are, sticking up baize and green carpets in it to prevent echoes. I have rarely seen a more uncomfortable edifice than I thought it last night.

Dolby tells us how Dickens and he visited the Pantomime, and Dickens's depression soon passed away, as he knew how invariable was their success in patching up the acoustic properties of such halls. Dolby concludes "As for the public they came in such numbers as to make the Torquay reading memorable as one of the most brilliant of the Final Farewell Reading Tour. The receipts amounted to nearly £270, an amount unprecedented in the history of entertainments in the town."

VIII

There are brief references to Plymouth in *Bleak House*; but Plymouth will be remembered by the readers of Dickens as the place where the relations of Mrs. Micawber had influence, so accordingly the family repaired thither after the brokers had turned them adrift from the Windsor Terrace, City Road house. Said Mrs. Micawber at the time:

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"The influence of my family being local, it is their wish that Mr. Micawber should go down to Plymouth. They think it indispensable that he should be upon the spot."

So the Micawbers went to Plymouth and returned empty:

"The truth is, talent is not wanted at the Custom House . . . when that branch of my family which is settled in Plymouth, became aware that Mr. Micawber was accompanied by myself, and by little Wilkins, and his sister and by the twins . . . our reception was cool."

Dickens paid two visits to Plymouth on his reading tours; the first in 1858 and the second in 1862. This was his last visit, as evidently he was not very well pleased with his reception.

You know I was very averse to going to Plymouth and would not have gone there again but for poor Arthur. But on the last night I read "Copperfield" and positively enthralled the people. It was the most overpowering effect, and . . . came behind the screen after the storm and cried in the manliest manner.

An account of the first visit is given in a letter to Miss Hogarth dated from West Hoe, Plymouth, August 5th, 1858:

Last night here was not so bright. There are quarrels of the strangest kind between the Plymouth people and the Stonehouse people. . . . We had a fair house, but not at all a great one. All the notabilities came this morning to "Little Dombey" . . . For "Mrs. Gamp" and "The Boots" to-night we have also a very promising let. But the races are on, and there are two public balls to-night, and the yacht squadron are at Cherbourg to boot. . . . The room is a very handsome one, but it is on top of a very windy and muddy hill, leading (literally) to nowhere; and it looks (except that it is new and mortary) as if the subsidence of the waters of the Deluge might have left it where it is. I have to go right through the company to get to the platform. Big doors slam and resound when anybody comes in; and all the company seem afraid of one another. Nevertheless they were a sensible audience last night, and much impressed and pleased.

And on August 7th, 1858, to his daughter Mamie: "The closing night at Plymouth was a very great scene and the morning there was exceedingly good, too."

There are many scattered references to Devonshire throughout the writings of Dickens, which show that the country visited in early manhood left its impression on the writer. *Nicholas Nickleby* is particularly rich in this respect. The Nicklebys came from "a sequestered part of the county of Devonshire" and it was in the same district that Smike breathed his last, probably quite close to the "small farm near Dawlish" which had been originally purchased by the grandfather of Nicholas; and his two children, Ralph and Nicholas went to school at Exeter. Mrs. Nickleby in her widowhood was often referring to those Devonshire days, and on one occasion speaks of "the election ball at Exeter"—a reminiscence of Dickens's reporting days, and on another refers to her friend "Miss Cropley of Exeter."

Mrs. Skewton in *Dombey and Son* had, we are informed, recently returned from a holiday in Devonshire, and in that delightful county Mr. Stuyver, in *A Tale of Two Cities*, also spent his vacation, whilst Tommy Traddles in *David Copperfield* was engaged to the "Devonshire Beauty," Sophy, the curate's daughter, "Such a dear girl . . . one of ten down in Devonshire" to visit whom Traddles walked all the way from London into Devon.

Dr. Marigold the Cheap-jack, whose wife ill-treated their little girl, and was the cause of her death, tells us:

One summer evening, when, as we were coming into Exeter, out of the farther West of England, we saw a woman beating a child in a cruel manner, who screamed, "Don't beat me! O mother, mother, mother!" Then my wife stopped her ears, and ran away like a wild thing, and next day she was found in the river.

IX

Prior to writing jointly with Wilkie Collins the Christmas Number for 1860 entitled *A Message from the Sea*, the two friends made a special journey into Devonshire to obtain the local colour. They started by train from Paddington on November 1st, and reached Bideford that same evening, a twelve hours journey at that time. On arriving he wrote to Miss Hogarth:

I write (with the most impracticable iron pen on earth) to report our safe arrival here in a beastly hotel. We start to-morrow at nine on a two days' posting between this and Liskeard. . . . We had stinking fish for dinner,

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and have been able to drink nothing, though we have ordered wine, beer, and brandy-and-water. There is nothing in the house but two tarts and a pair of snuffers. The landlady is playing cribbage with the landlord in the next room (behind a thin partition), and they seem quite comfortable.

Even without the editorial note in the Letters that the scene of the story was laid in Clovelly, this description of the village of Steepways as Dickens called it, readily reveals that Clovelly was the place which Captain Jorgan, looking up at it from the pier, described in these words which form the opening of the story.

"And a mighty sing'lar and pretty place it is, as ever I saw in all the days of my life!" said Captain Jorgan, looking up at it.

Dickens's own words in describing Steepways are as perfect a pen picture as any he wrote:

Captain Jorgan had to look high to look at it, for the village was built sheer up the face of a steep and lofty cliff. There was no road in it, there was no wheeled vehicle in it, there was not a level yard in it. From the sea-beach to the cliff-top two irregular rows of white houses, placed opposite to one another, and twisting here and there, and there and here, rose, like the sides of a long succession of stages of crooked ladders, and you climbed up the village or climbed down the village by the staves between, some six feet wide or so, and made of sharp irregular stones.

The old pack-saddle, long laid aside in most parts of England as one of the appendages of its infancy, flourished here intact. Strings of pack-horses and pack-donkeys toiled slowly up the staves of the ladders, bearing fish, and coal, and such other cargo as was unshipping at the pier from the dancing fleet of village boats, and from two or three little coasting traders. As the beasts of burden ascended laden, or descended light, they got so lost at intervals in the floating clouds of village smoke, that they seemed to dive down some of the village chimneys, and come to the surface again far off, high above others. No two houses in the village were alike, in chimney, size, shape, door, window, gable, roof-tree, anything. The sides of the ladders were musical with water, running clear and bright. The staves were musical with the clattering

feet of the pack-horses and pack-donkeys, and the voices of the fishermen urging them up, mingled with the voices of the fishermen's wives and their many children. The pier was musical with the wash of the sea, and creaking of capstans and windlasses, and the airy fluttering of little vanes and sails. The rough, sea-bleached boulders of which the pier was made, and the whiter boulders of the shore, were brown with drying nets. The red-brown cliffs, richly wooded to their extremest verge, had their softened and beautiful forms reflected in the bluest water, under the clear North Devonshire sky of a November day without a cloud. The village itself was so steeped in autumnal foliage, from the houses lying on the pier to the topmost round of the topmost ladder, that one might have fancied it was out a-bird's-nesting, and was (as indeed it was) a wonderful climber.

Whilst viewing this prospect, Captain Jorgan met Tom Pettifer, who was able to put him on the track of the name he was seeking.

The two climbed high up the village—which had the most arbitrary turns and twists in it, so that the cobbler's house came dead across the ladder, and to have held a reasonable course, you must have gone through his house, and through him too, as he sat at his work between two little windows, with one eye microscopically on the geological formation of that part of Devonshire, and the other telescopically on the open sea,—the two climbed high up the village, and stopped before a quaint little house, on which was painted, "Mrs. Raybrock, Draper"; and also "Post-Office." Before it, ran a rill of murmuring water, and access to it was gained by a little plank-bridge.

"Here's the name," said Captain Jorgan, "sure enough. You can come in if you like, Tom."

The captain opened the door, and passed into an old little shop, about six feet high, with a great variety of beams and bumps in the ceiling, and, besides the principal window giving on the ladder of stones, a purblind little window of a single pane of glass, peeping out of an abutting corner at the sun-lighted ocean, and winking at its brightness.

The street of Clovelly is full of such houses, and the description of the interior might well apply to-day to many of them.

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Enjoining Tom to give an eye to the shop, Captain Jorgan followed Mrs. Raybrock into the little, low, back-room,—decorated with divers plants in pots, tea-trays, old china teapots, and punch-bowls,—which was at once the private sitting room of the Raybrock family and the inner cabinet of the post-office of the village of Steepways.

The Cornish village of Lanrean with its King Arthur's Arms to which Captain Jorgan went to make enquiries, does not exist outside the imagination of the author, and his attempt to coin a Cornish word, whilst very creditable as to sound, has no meaning in the ancient language.

Both Barnstaple in North Devon and Falmouth in Cornwall, are casually mentioned in this story.

x

After his return from America in 1842, Dickens spent three weeks of the autumn in Cornwall with Forster, Maclise and Clarkson Stanfield. As Forster says, "Railways helped us then not much; but where the roads were inaccessible to post-horses we walked." And Dickens adds that they "went down into Devonshire by railroad and there we hired an open carriage." The Great Western Railway was only complete as far as Bristol in those days, but they no doubt got into North Cornwall by a local line from there, as from the accounts we have the party appears to have visited Tintagel before reaching Land's End.

Dickens gave a humorous account of the trip in a letter to his American friend Professor Felton:

Blessed star of morning! Such a trip as we had into Cornwall just after Longfellow went away! We went down into Devonshire by railroad, and there we hired an open carriage from an innkeeper, patriotic in all Pickwick matters, and went on with post-horses. Sometimes we travelled all night, sometimes all day, sometimes both. . . . Heavens! If you could have seen the necks of bottles, distracting in their immense varieties of shape, peeping out of the carriage-pockets! If you could have witnessed the deep devotion of the post-boys, the wild attachment of the hostlers, the maniac glee of the waiters! If you could have followed us into the earthy old churches we visited, and into the strange caverns on the gloomy sea-shore, and down into the depths of mines, and up to the tops of giddy heights where the unspeakably green water was

roaring, I don't know how many hundred feet below! If you could have seen but one gleam of the bright fires by which we sat in the big rooms of the ancient inns at night, until long after the small hours had come and gone. . . . I never laughed in my life as I did on this journey. It would have done you good to hear me. I was choking, and gasping, and bursting the buckle off the back of my stock, all the way. And Stanfield got into such apoplectic entanglements that we were often obliged to beat him on the back with portmanteaus before we could recover him. Seriously, I do believe there never was such a trip. And they made such sketches, those two men, in the most romantic of our halting-places, that you would have sworn we had the Spirit of Beauty with us, as well as the Spirit of Fun.

"Tintagel was visited," says Forster, "and no part of mountain or sea consecrated by the legends of *Arthur* was left unexplored."

It is unfortunate that Dickens left no further record of this trip, but a letter of Macrise to Forster some years later respecting Forster's agility in gaining high places, and his steadiness when there, tells us that they clambered up the Goat Path to King Arthur's Castle at Tintagel, ascended to the cradle of the highest tower of Mount St. Michael, and rocked themselves on the Logan Stone, of which latter event, Stanfield has left an historic drawing which shows Forster perched right on the very top.

The Waterfall at St. Nighton near Tintagel was painted by both Stanfield and Macrise and exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1843. Macrise's picture contained the figure of Miss Hogarth, which Dickens purchased secretly, as he did not wish to impose upon the generosity of the artist, who when he found Dickens was the purchaser, wished to return the money.

Boase in his "Collectanea Cornubiensis" records the fact that when Dickens was at Marazion in 1842, Mr. Tippet, a solicitor, and member of the Penzance Town Council, being anxious to see something of him, persuaded Mr. George Sealy, the landlord of the Marazion Hotel, to allow him to serve as one of the waiters. The dinner had nearly concluded when one of the guests in making a latin quotation placed the accent on the wrong syllable. Mr. Tippet, a fair scholar, immediately noticed the occurrence, and quite off his guard, said, "Excuse me, sir, I think that the accent

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is on the *e.*” The company, surprised at finding a waiter so well read in his classics, asked for an explanation, and the result was that Mr. Tippet was invited to join the company at dessert.

Land’s End naturally impressed the whole of the party, and Forster writing in this respect tells us:

Land and sea yielded each its marvels to us; but of all the impressions brought away, of which some afterwards took forms as lasting as they could receive from the most delightful art, I doubt if any were the source of such deep emotion to us all as a sunset we saw at Land’s End. Stanfield knew the wonders of the Continent, the glories of Ireland were native to Maclige, I was familiar from boyhood with border and Scottish scenery, and Dickens was fresh from Niagara; but there was something in the sinking of the sun behind the Atlantic that autumn afternoon, as we viewed it together from the top of the rock projecting farthest into the sea, which each in his turn declared to have no parallel in memory.

The connection of Cornwall with his next book is shown by Forster, who says that the first letter from Dickens after their return (dated November 12th) announced:

“Behold finally the title of the new book, don’t lose it, for I have no copy.” Title and even story had been undetermined while we travelled, from the lingering wish he still had to begin it among those Cornish scenes; but this intention had now been finally abandoned, and the reader lost nothing by his substitution, for the lighthouse or mine in Cornwall, of the Wiltshire-village forge on the windy autumn evening which opens the tale of *Martin Chuzzlewit*.“

Dickens did not however entirely abandon the idea of localising a story in Cornwall, for during 1847 he was in communication with Mr. Sandys, a Cornishman, who had promised him some books to help him with the dialect. However, the idea was ultimately abandoned, for we find Dickens writing to Sandys in June 1847:

“Your account of the Cornishmen gave me great pleasure. . . . I have for the present abandoned the idea of sinking a shaft in Cornwall.”

According to a writer in the *Western Morning News* for December 13th 1922, under the initials T.M., the influence of Dickens’s three weeks holiday in Cornwall in 1842 is shown in a portion of *A Christmas Carol* written the year following. “Some years ago,” he writes, “the writer, a Cornishman who

was re-reading the Carol on Christmas Eve, discovered to his delight that it contained some beautifully worded and striking description of the Land's End district of Cornwall. No names are mentioned, but the places are, to the observant reader who knows that district, plain and unmistakable."

The passage referred to is where the third of the spirits takes Scrooge into far off parts, over the Cornish Moors to Land's End and across the sea to the old Longships Lighthouse.

And now, without a word of warning from the Ghost, they stood upon a bleak and desert moor, where monstrous masses of rude stone were cast about, as though it were the burial-place o' giants; and water spread itself wheresoever it listed, or would have done so, but for the frost that held it prisone^r; and nothing grew but moss and furze, and coarse rank grass. Down in the west the setting sun had left a streak of fiery red, which glared upon the desolation for an instant, like a sullen eye, and trown^{ing} lower, lower, lower yet, was lost in the thick gloom of darkest night.

"What place is this?" asked Scrooge.

"A place where miners live, who labour in the bowels of the earth," returned the Spirit. "But they know me. See!"

A light shone from the window of a hut, and swiftly they advanced towards it. Passing through the wall of mud and stone, they found a cheerful company assembled round a glowing fire. An old, old man and woman, with their children and their children's children, and another generation beyond that, all decked out gaily in their holiday attire. The old man, in a voice that seldom rose above the howling of the wind upon the barren waste, was singing them a Christmas song; it had been a very old song when he was a boy, and from time to time they all joined in the chorus.

The "place where miners live" is located by the writer of the article above mentioned, as in the district of St. Just in Penwith, which place was probably in Dickens's mind when at the Holly Tree Inn (the Christmas Number for 1855) he was recalling the various inns he had known in different parts of the world.

It was in the remotest part of Cornwall. A great annual Miner's Feast was being holden at the inn, when I and my travelling companions presented ourselves at night among the wild crowd that were dancing before it

by torchlight. We had had a break-down in the dark, on a stony morass some miles away; and I had the honour of leading one of the unharnessed post-horses. If any lady or gentleman, on perusal of the present lines, will take any very tall post-horse with his traces hanging about his legs, and will conduct him by the bearing-rein into the heart of a country dance of a hundred and fifty couples, that lady or gentleman will then, and only then, form an adequate idea of the extent to which that post-horse will tread on his conductor's toes. Over and above which the post-horse, finding three hundred people whirling about him, will probably rear, and also lash out with his hind legs, in a manner incompatible with dignity or self-respect on his conductor's part. With such little drawbacks on my usually impressive aspect, I appeared at this Cornish Inn, to the unutterable wonder of the Cornish Miners. It was full, and twenty times full, and nobody could be received but the post-horse,—though to get rid of that noble animal was something. While my fellow-travellers and I were discussing how to pass the night and so much of the next day as must intervene before the jovial blacksmith and the jovial wheelwright would be in a condition to go out on the morass and mend the coach, an honest man stepped forth from the crowd and proposed his unlet floor of two rooms, with supper of eggs and bacon, ale and punch. We joyfully accompanied him home to the strangest of clean houses, where we were well entertained to the satisfaction of all parties. But the novel feature of the entertainment was, that our host was a chair-maker, and that the chairs assigned to us were mere frames, altogether without bottoms of any sort; so that we passed the evening on perches. Nor was this the absurdest consequence; for when we unbent at supper, and any one of us gave way to laughter he forgot the peculiarity of his position, and instantly disappeared. I myself, doubled up into an attitude from which self-extrication was impossible, was taken out of my frame, like a clown in a comic pantomime who has tumbled into a tub, five times by the taper's light during eggs and bacon.

The above, written in 1855, must surely have been a reminiscence of the autumn holiday thirteen years before.

The reference to the old Longships Lighthouse in *A Christmas Carol* is contained in the following:

The Spirit did not tarry here, but bade Scrooge hold his robe, and passing on above the moor, sped whither? Not to sea? To sea. To Scrooge's horror, looking back, he saw the last of the land, a frightful range of rocks, behind them; and his ears were deafened by the thundering of water, as it rolled and roared and raged among the dreadful caverns it had worn, and fiercely tried to undermine the earth.

Built upon a dismal reef of sunken rocks, some league or so from shore, on which the waters chafed and dashed, the wild year through, there stood a solitary lighthouse. Great heaps of seaweed clung to its base, and storm birds . . . rose and fell about it, like the waves they skimmed.

Young Walter Gay it was who used to like to hear from his uncle Sol Gills, tales of gale and shipwreck and boats "driven ashore on the coast of Cornwall" and this again must have re-called to Dickens the wild scenery he had viewed off the Cornish coast a few years previously.

In *Martin Chuzzlewit* there is a reference to "men of large stature bred in the mining districts of Cornwall" and in *Little Dorrit*, we find Mr. Panks asking Arthur Clennam if he was related to the Clennams of Cornwall, and was much disappointed to hear that he was not, for "you'd have heard of something to your advantage" he said " . . . There's a Cornish property going a-begging sir, and not a Cornish Clennam to have it for the asking."

A Cornish authority informs us that there are no Clennam's in Cornwall, and that Clennam is not a Cornish name.

CHAPTER SEVEN

THE MIDLANDS AND NORTH WALES WITH PHIZ AND DICKENS

I

ON the completion of his second book, *Oliver Twist*, Dickens took two bachelor holidays with Hablot K. Browne (Phiz). The first was in the summer of 1838 when they journeyed into Yorkshire to investigate the matter of the notorious schools there, and this pilgrimage is dealt with in Chapter Nine.

The second was into North Wales, with no particular object in view, so far as we can ascertain; but certain impressions were obtained on the way which served a very useful purpose in *The Old Curiosity Shop* written some twelve months later, and to a lesser extent, aided by later visits, the background to some of the incidents in *Dombey and Son*.

Dickens's Diary commenced on January 1st of that year and closed after a trial of only a few days with the words, "Here ends this brief attempt at a diary, I grow sad over this checking off my days, and can't do it," was for some unaccountable reason re-opened on the occasion of this trip and from it we can obtain some very interesting information of the way the party travelled, and although we deal with each place visited in its due place upon the journey, it is useful to view as a whole the journey as Dickens and Phiz took it.

On Monday, October 29th, 1838 he notes: "Started from Coach Office near Hungerford Street with Browne—agreeable ride but cold." A further note tells us that the fares to Leamington were 17s. each and that the tips to coachman, guard and porter amounted to no less than 14s. The night was spent at Copp's Hotel, Leamington, "excellent inn," where the bill for the night amounted to no less than £2 19s.

On Tuesday, October 30th, they proceeded to Kenilworth, Warwick and Stratford-on-Avon, where they stayed the night.

Monday, OCTOBER 29, 1838

203/3 (MS.)

	Hare Hunting Expenses	\$	D
Half-day expenses on Saturday -	1	12	0
Train to Leamington 17/- each -	1	14	0
Coach to Stratford 1/- each -	—	2	6
Coachmen's wages and pates -	—	14	-
Dinner -	—	6	-

Notes from coach office near Shrewsbury
start with Brown - agreeable ride, but
cold - Leamington Copp's Hotel - excellent
inn.

Tuesday, OCTOBER 30, 1838.

203/3 (MS.)

Breakfast at Leamington	2.	19	0	
Boats of Coalport Castle and visit	—	6.	-	
Expenses at Warwick Castle	—	6.	6	
Town, with -	—	—	1.	6
Horses and post-boy	—	1.	13.	0

way to Leamington - delightful - beautiful
beyond expression - never what a summer
visit. - this month - are what the
news - books - thoughts - strong, turn
this over for next year

The Midlands and North Wales 135

On Wednesday, October 31st, the journey was continued through Birmingham and Wolverhampton to Shrewsbury, where the night was spent at the Lion Hotel.

On Thursday, November 1st, in the afternoon, they took the Post-chaise to Llangollen and stayed at the Hand Hotel.

On Friday, November 2nd, they posted to Bangor and from there to Capel Curig where they spent the night.

On Saturday, November 3rd, they posted from Capel Curig to Chester and stayed there until Monday when an entry shows they paid the "bill at Chester £3 18s." and then went on to Birkenhead. There is no entry in the diary under Sunday, nor any mention of the Hotel at which they stayed at Chester.

From Birkenhead they probably went on to Liverpool, as the entry on the Tuesday states "Bill at Adelphi £4 10s. 9d." Forster tells us that he met Dickens at Liverpool at this time, so that accounts for the entry of three fares to Manchester on the following day.

On Tuesday, November 6th, appears this entry in the diary: "3 fares to Manchester 3 times." We are at a loss to explain why three separate journeys were necessary to Manchester. We should imagine the party left Liverpool on the Tuesday, as there is a note of having paid the bill at the Adelphi on that day; and it is probable they went to Manchester and then on to Cheadle.

On Wednesday, November 7th, there is an entry "Chaise to Cheadle £1 1s." but whether the journey was made on that day or the day previous is difficult to say. There is also noted on this date "Bill at Inn £4" and "Fares to London £7 13s.;" so probably the return was made on the Wednesday or Thursday, and so the holiday finished.

The first part of the Great North Road as far as Barnet is common also to the Holyhead Road which runs through the Midlands and which is the subject of the present chapter; the Great North Road from Barnet covering the Dotheboys Route of *Nicholas Nickleby* is dealt with in Chapter Nine.

A portion of this journey is also associated with Little Nell's wanderings with her Grandfather; with this we deal separately in the next chapter.

II

The Great North Road was second only to the Dover Road in the affections of Dickens, and so it has left its impress in his works. First and foremost perhaps is the journey made

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by Nicholas Nickleby in the company of Mr. Squeers to Dotheboys Hall in Yorkshire, following quickly upon a journey of inspection made by Dickens himself in January 1838 in company with Hablot K. Browne, the artist who is better known as Phiz.

Oliver Twist made his first acquaintance with London by this road entering it via Barnet and Islington, and the same road is associated with Noah Claypole, and with Bill Sikes in his flight after the murder of Nancy. The same road, too, witnessed the arrival of John Browdie and his bride, and saw the departure of Esther Summerson, Ada and Richard, for Bleak House, near St. Albans.

So far as the first portion of the Great North Road is concerned, it passes through Islington, Holloway, Highgate and Finchley to Barnet and has many associations with both Dickens personally and with his novels. The City Road leading to Islington is indelibly associated with the Micawbers, who lived in Windsor Terrace; and at Islington itself, Tom Pinch lived with his sister Ruth, and the walk of Oliver and the Dodger, from the Angel, Islington, to Fagin's in Field Lane, is very clearly described in *Oliver Twist*.

Mr. Micawber once had lodgings at Pentonville, so did Nicodemus Dumps, Guppy and Panks. Mr. Brownlow lived here, as actually did Grimaldi and George Cruikshank.

A noteworthy picture of stage coach travelling is given in the opening of the Christmas Story for 1855, *The Holly Tree Inn*.

There was no Northern Railway at that time, and in its place there were stage-coaches; which I occasionally find myself, in common with some other people, affecting to lament now, but which everybody dreaded as a very serious penance then. I had secured the box-seat on the fastest of these.

This coach started from the Peacock at Islington.

When I got up to the Peacock,—where I found everybody drinking hot purl, in self-preservation, I then discovered that I was the only passenger. However, I took a little purl (which I found uncommonly good), and got into the coach. When I was seated, they built me up with straw to the waist, and, conscious of making a rather ridiculous appearance, I began my journey.

It was still dark when we left the Peacock . . . and we were rattling for Highgate Archway over the hardest ground I have ever heard the ring of iron shoes on. As we got into the country, everything seemed to have grown

old and gray. The roads, the trees, thatched roofs of cottages and homesteads, the ricks in farmer's yards . . . little turnpike houses had blazing fires inside, and children (even turnpike people have children, and seem to like them) rubbed the frost from the little panes of glass with their chubby arms, that their bright eyes might catch a glimpse of the solitary coach going by.

At the Archway Tavern, Highgate, the road forks. To the right Archway Road leads to Barnet. This was the road by which Oliver Twist, accompanied by the Dodger, arrived in London ; this was the road to and from Bleak House which was near St. Albans. Through Highgate Archway, the one that was replaced by the present bridge, Noah Claypole and Charlotte came "advancing towards London by the Great North Road" and in *The Holly Tree Inn* we are told of the coach "rattling for Highgate Archway over the hardest ground I have ever heard the ring of iron shoes on."

"At the Archway toll (over at Highgate" Bucket first picked up the trail of Lady Dedlock.

The old Great North Road to Highgate runs to the left of the Archway Tavern, ascending Highgate Hill ; Bill Sikes "went through Islington" when endeavouring to escape after the murder of Nancy ; and "strode up the hill at Highgate on which stands the stone in honour of Whittington." The stone referred to is to be seen on the left, incorporated in a lamp post. When Swiveller was taunted by Quilp, he threatened to run away ; "towards Highgate I suppose" he said to himself. "Perhaps the bells might strike up 'Turn again Swiveller.'" Joe Willet came this way when he ran away from home and Dolly ; "He went out by Islington and so on to Highgate, and sat on many stones, and gates, but there were no voices in the bells to bid him turn" says Dickens.

Bill Sikes continuing his flight, turned down to Highgate Hill, unsteady of purpose, and uncertain where to go ; struck off to the right again, almost as soon as he began to descend it ; and taking the footpath across the fields, skirted Caen Wood, and so came out on Hampstead Heath. Traversing the hollow by the Vale of Health, he mounted the opposite bank, and crossing the road which joins the villages of Hampstead and Highgate, made along the remaining portion of the Heath to the fields at North End, in one of which he laid himself down under a hedge, and slept. . . .

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Where could he go, that was near and not too public, to get some meat and drink? Hendon. That was a good place, not far off, and out of most people's way. Thither he directed his steps. . . . But when he got there, all the people he met . . . seemed to view him with suspicion. Back he turned again, without the courage to purchase bit or drop, and once more he lingered on the Heath, uncertain where to go.

He wandered over miles and miles of ground, and still came back to the old place. . . .

At Highgate, where Mr. Pickwick carried out "unwearied researches" Dickens lodged for a time in 1832, at "Mrs. Goodman's next door to the Red Lion" which was in North Road itself; and it was doubtless at this period that Dickens obtained most of the local colour of the road and the district as far as Barnet which he used so successfully in *Oliver Twist* and *Barnaby Rudge*. Steerforth, Dr. Strong, and David and Dora all lived at Highgate, and in the cemetery there lie the father of Dickens, and his little daughter Dora Annie.

Hampstead Lane on the left leads past Caen Wood (mentioned above) into Spaniard's Lane and Hampstead. Caen Wood—or Ken Wood—now preserved as an open space—was Lord Mansfield's country house which the Gordon Rioters endeavoured to destroy, as described in *Barnaby Rudge*.

The Spaniard's Inn is introduced into *The Pickwick Papers* when Mrs. Bardell, Mrs. Raddle and other friends spent an afternoon there. Here she was traced by Mr. Jackson, clerk to Dodson & Fogg and conveyed thence to the Fleet Prison for the costs in the action which Mr. Pickwick had so steadfastly refused to pay.

On the left may be seen the Hampstead Ponds—the speculations on the source of which formed one of the papers communicated to the Club by Mr. Pickwick, "the man who had traced to their source the mighty ponds of Hampstead."

Hampstead Heath opens out just beyond the Spaniards. Walter Gay "knew of no better fields than those near Hampstead" for reflecting on the unknown life before him when he was ordered by the house of Dombey to sail for the Barbadoes.

A walk to Hampstead and Highgate—after a dip in the Roman Bath in the Strand, was often indulged in by David Copperfield.

Jack Straw's Castle was a very popular rendezvous with Dickens. Forster quotes the following typical letter from

Dickens proposing a walk and dinner at this hostelry: "You don't feel disposed, do you, to muffle yourself up, and start off with me for a good brisk walk over Hampstead-heath? I know a good 'ous there where we can have a red-hot chop for dinner, and a glass of good wine." This, Forster adds, "led to our first experience of Jack Straw's Castle, memorable for many happy meetings in coming years."

During the writing of *The Pickwick Papers*, after the death of his sister-in-law Mary, Dickens went for a few months to live at Hampstead; in later years—whilst writing *Bleak House* he spent a summer at Wylde's Farm, near North End.

At Finchley, Barnaby Rudge and his father, after escaping from Newgate "found in a pasture . . . a poor shed with walls of mud, and roof of grass and brambles, built for some cow herd but now deserted. Here they lay down for the rest of the night."

Abel Cottage, the home of Mr. Garland, where Kit and Barbara were employed, was at Finchley.

To be sure, it was a beautiful little cottage with a thatched roof, and little spires at the gable ends, and pieces of stained glass in some of the windows, almost as large as pocket books.

In 1843, at Cobley's Farm, Finchley, Dickens took lodgings whilst writing a part of *Martin Chuzzlewit*.

III

In the story of *Oliver Twist* as now published, Dickens does not give any clue as to the identity of the town where Oliver Twist was born and brought up; and except for the introduction of the town of Barnet, and the information afforded by Chapter VIII of the story, that the milestone at which Oliver gazed on the morning he ran away, after he had covered more than five miles, told him it was seventy miles to London, we might have added another important incident to the Dickensian history of Rochester.

Oliver Twist was first published as a serial story in *Bentley's Miscellany* which Dickens was editing, and in the opening chapter of the story we are told that the town in question was Mudfog, a name by which Dickens often spoke of Rochester and Chatham.

According to Kitton, the town from which Oliver walked to London was either Peterborough or Grantham, probably the former. It is to be regretted that we have no evidence

upon which we can locate the actual original of the seat of Bumbledom. As in the case of Eatanswill with its corruption and dissension, Dickens drew a composite picture, and it would have been extremely injudicious had he fixed upon any particular town by name, for the purpose of the exposures he had in mind.

However in the present instance we have to deal with Barnet as it appeared to Oliver Twist on the seventh morning of his freedom.

Early on the seventh morning after he had left his native place, Oliver limped slowly into the little town of Barnet. The window-shutters were closed; the street was empty; not a soul had awakened to the business of the day. The sun was rising in all its splended beauty; but the light only served to show the boy his own lonesomeness and desolation, as he sat, with bleeding feet and covered with dust, upon a door-step. . . .

He had been crouching on the step for some time; wondering at the great number of public-houses (every other house in Barnet was a tavern, large or small), gazing listlessly at the coaches as they passed through, and thinking how strange it seemed that they could do, with ease, in a few hours, what it had taken him a whole week of courage and determination beyond his years to accomplish; when he was roused by observing that a boy, who had passed him carelessly some minutes before, had returned, and was now surveying him most earnestly from the opposite side of the way.

The boy was, of course, the Artful Dodger, who accompanied Oliver to London and introduced him to Fagin. What the Artful was doing so far from his usual beat we are not told. The story continues:

*

Assisting Oliver to rise, the young gentleman took him to an adjacent chandler's shop, where he purchased a sufficiency of ready-dressed ham and a half-quartern loaf. . . . Taking the bread under his arm, the young gentleman turned into a small public-house, and led the way to a taproom in the rear of the premises. Here a pot of beer was brought in by direction of the mysterious youth; and Oliver, falling to at his new friend's bidding, made a long and hearty meal, during the progress of which, the strange boy eyed him from time to time with great attention.

We cannot agree with those writers who state the "small public-house" to be the important coaching inn The Red Lion; "every other house in Barnet was a tavern large or small" says Dickens, so we have a very wide range of choice.

The Red Lion Inn on the London side of Barnet was well known to Dickens. Forster recalls the day in March 1838, three days after the birth of his eldest daughter Mamie, to whom Forster became Godfather, when Dickens proposed a rendezvous at the Red Lion at Barnet.

"I can do nothing this morning. What time will you ride? The sooner the better for a good long spell" wrote Dickens, and Forster tells us that they "rode out fifteen miles on the great north road, and, after dining at The Red Lion in Barnet on our way home, distinguished the already memorable day by bringing in both hacks dead lame."

The Inn is still standing, and its prominent sign is a noticeable Barnet landmark

IV

The journey of Esther Summerson, Ada Clare and Richard Carstone to Bleak House near St. Albans takes us along this same road, which Dickens describes in the following picturesque language:

We went our way through the sunshine and the fresh air, wondering more and more at the extent of the streets, the brilliancy of the shops, the great traffic, and the crowds of people. . . . By-and-bye we began to leave the wonderful city, and to proceed through suburbs which, of themselves, would have made a pretty large town, in my eyes; and at last we got into a real country road again, with windmills, rickyards, milestones, farmers' waggons, scents of old hay, swinging signs and horse troughs; trees, fields, and hedgerows. It was delightful to see the green landscape before us, and the immense metropolis behind; and when a waggon with a train of beautiful horses furnished with red trappings and clear-sounding bells, came by us with its music, I believe we could all three have sung to the bells, so cheerful were the influences around.

"The whole road has been reminding me of my namesake Whittington" said Richard, "and that waggon is the finishing touch."

The waggon was one of Mr. Jarndyce's and the waggoner ad a delightful letter of welcome to each of the party from

the owner of Bleak House. From the reference made to Whittington, this event occurred somewhere in the neighbourhood of Highgate Hill.

The roads were very heavy for the horses, but the pathway was generally good; so we alighted and walked up all the hills, and liked it so well that we prolonged our walk on the level ground when we got to the top. At Barnet there were other horses waiting for us; but as they had only just been fed we had to wait for them too.

This no doubt occurred at the Red Lion, to which we have already made reference, as it was the principal posting house of the town. Whilst waiting, the party took "a long fresh walk over a common and an old battlefield." This has reference at Hadley Common over which the main North Road to Hatfield passes; a stone obelisk records the fact that the Battle of Barnet Field was fought here in 1471.

The road to St. Albans turns off to the left just before reaching Hadley Common, and Esther Summerson tells us that

The long night had closed in, before we came to St. Albans; near to which town Bleak House was, we knew.

We are told they "rattled over the stones of the old street . . . turned out of the town, round a corner . . . and gazed round upon the open country and the starlight night, for our destination."

There was a light sparkling on the top of a hill before us, and the driver, pointing to it with his whip, and crying, "That's Bleak House!" put his horses into a canter, and took us forward at such a rate, uphill though it was, that the wheels sent the road drift flying about our heads like spray from a watermill. Presently we lost the light, presently saw it, presently lost it, presently saw it, and turned into an avenue of trees; and cantered up towards where it was beaming brightly. It was in a window of what seemed to be an old-fashioned house, with three peaks in the roof in front, and a circular sweep leading to the porch.

The whereabouts of Bleak House is another of those Dickensian mysteries that we fear will never be solved, as it has never been made clear that Dickens was sufficiently familiar with any house in the neighbourhood of St. Albans that could have stood for the delightful residence of Mr. Jarndyce.

Kitton, who lived in St. Albans, has located it as a house in Gombards Road on the northern outskirts of the city; an early Georgian house which since about the year 1890 has been known as "Bleak House."

It is perhaps just as well to state here that the house at Broadstairs known as Bleak House, which Dickens occupied in 1850 must not be associated in any way with the novel; at the time Dickens lived there it was known as Fort House.

According to a writer in "The Unitarian Monthly" for June 1919, the house known as Bleak Hall at Kensworth, ten miles from St. Albans, was the prototype of the Bleak House of the novel. Mr. T. W. Tyrrell, writing on the subject in "The Dickensian" for January 1920, satisfactorily disposed of the claim, pointing out that according to the copyhold deed it was not until June 1852, two months after the publication of the part of Bleak House containing the description of Mr. Jarndyce's residence, that three cottages were purchased, altered, turned into one house and named Bleak Hall.

Kitton in his notes in the Rochester Edition of *Bleak House* states: "Evidence was recently forthcoming (in the form of an unpublished letter) that, while engaged upon the story, Dickens visited St. Albans . . . for local colour." He repeats this in "The Dickens Country," adding that he was engaged upon the early chapters and stayed with Douglas Jerrold at the Queen's Hotel in Chequer Street, which hotel no longer exists. Mr. William Miller has in his collection a letter of Dickens dated from the Queen's Hotel, St. Albans, June 16th, 1852, two months after the detailed description of Mr. Jarndyce's house had been published; whether or not this was the letter to which Kitton referred, it is not possible to say.

However, Kitton adds the information that Dickens's younger brother Frederick, as well as his friend Peter Cunningham, were living in St. Albans at about this time, so Dickens was doubtless quite familiar with the City, and the writer in the "Unitarian Monthly" referred to above, states that in 1919 the schoolmaster at Kensworth was named Dickens, whilst the one time owner of the farm at the back of Bleak Hall was named Dickins; so it is probable that a branch of the family settled at St. Albans.

"Bleak House . . . is in Hertfordshire" explained Mr. Kenge to the Lord Chancellor. "A dreary name" said the Lord Chancellor. "But not a dreary place," said Mr. Kenge.

Bleak House is thus described by Esther:

It was one of those delightfully irregular houses where you go up and down steps out of one room into another, and where you come upon more rooms when you think you have seen all there are, and where there is a bountiful provision of little halls and passages, and where you find still older cottage-rooms in unexpected places, with lattice windows and green growth pressing through them. Mine, which we entered first, was of this kind, with an up-and-down roof, that had more corners in it than I ever counted afterwards, and a chimney (there was a wood-fire on the hearth) paved all around with pure white tiles, in every one of which a bright miniature of the fire was blazing. Out of this room, you went down two steps, into a charming little sitting-room, looking down upon a flower-garden, which room was henceforth to belong to Ada and me.

The interior, it has been pointed out, bears a striking resemblance to Elm Cottage at Petersham where Dickens lived for a short time in 1839.

The prospect from her bedroom window as viewed on the first morning after her arrival is as follows:

The day shone bright upon a cheerful landscape, prominent in which the Old Abbey Church, with its massive tower, threw a softer train of shadow on the view than seemed compatible with its rugged character. But so from rough outsides (I hope I have learnt), serene and gentle influences often proceed.

The garden was found to be "quite a delightful place; in front the pretty avenue and drive by which we had approached . . . at the back the flower garden . . . beyond the flower garden was a kitchen garden and then a paddock, and then a snug little rick yard, and then a dear little farm yard." This is somewhat reminiscent of Gad's Hill Place!

Esther continues:

As to the house itself with its three peaks in the roof; its various shaped windows, some so large, some so small, all so pretty; its trellis work against the south front for the roses and honeysuckle, and its homely, comfortable welcoming look.

There must have been some house in Dickens's mind when he wrote this and there was no such house in St. Albans

with which he was familiar. We venture therefore to offer the suggestion that Bleak House was Gad's Hill Place transplanted from the south to the north.

v

When Lady Dedlock disappeared from the Dedlock town house, Inspector Bucket was charged by Sir Leicester to find her; and in order to successfully accomplish his mission, he enlisted the service and sympathy of Esther Summerson, who had only lately discovered that Lady Dedlock was her mother.

They started from London late one night, and after visiting several London police offices, and crossing and re-crossing the River they "came at length from the pavement on to dark smooth roads, and began to leave the houses behind" them.

After a while, I recognised the familiar way to Saint Albans. At Barnet, fresh horses were ready for us, and we changed and went on. It was very cold indeed; and the open country was white with snow, though none was falling then.

"An old acquaintance of yours, this road, Miss Summerson" said Mr. Bucket, cheerfully.

Mr. Bucket was continually making enquiries the whole way, and consequently

With all these stoppages, it was between five and six o'clock and we were yet a few miles short of Saint Albans, when he came out of one of these houses and handed me in a cup of tea.

"She's on ahead" announced Bucket. "Passed through here on foot this evening, about eight or nine. . . .

"I heard of her first at the archway toll, over at Highgate, but couldn't make quite sure. Traced her all along, on and off. Picked her up at one place, and dropped her at another; but she's before us now, safe . . ."

"We were soon in Saint Albans, and alighted a little before day. . . . Leaving the carriage at the posting-house and ordering fresh horses to be ready, my companion gave me his arm, and we went towards home."

From Bleak House they went to the brickmakers', which Mr. Bucket was sure had been visited by Lady Dedlock. Jenny was absent; but her husband, and Liz and her husband

were there, and Jenny's husband gave out that Jenny had "gone up to Lunnon" and the lady in exactly the opposite direction "Nor'ard, by the high road. Ask on the road if you doubt me, and see if it warn't so."

Actually Lady Dedlock, in Jenny's dress, had returned to London; but Bucket was deceived, and forward he went in search, through the thick blinding snow, thinking she was making for Chesney Wold. At what was probably intended to be the George at Grantham (see page 199). Bucket came to the conclusion he was on a wild goose chase and surprised Esther very much by ordering the carriage back to London.

The journey back to London, is vividly described:

It was three o'clock in the morning when the houses outside London did at last begin to exclude the country, and to close us in with streets. We had made our way along roads in a far worse condition than when we had traversed them by daylight, both the fall and the thaw having lasted ever since; but the energy of my companion never slackened. . . . Never wavering, he never even stopped to make an inquiry until we were within a few miles of London . . . and thus we came, at between three and four o'clock in the morning, into Islington. . . .

We stopped in a high-street, where there was a coach-stand. My companion paid our two drivers, who were as completely covered with splashes as if they had been dragged along the roads like the carriage itself; and giving them some brief direction where to take it, lifted me out of it and into a hackney coach he had chosen from the rest.

And so Esther at length reached the burial ground where her mother whom she did not at first recognise, being disguised in Jenny's dress, was discovered "cold and dead."

The flight of Lady Dedlock through roads of such terrible condition is looked upon as a marvellous performance—and it finds a parallel with that of Miss Flite who walked from London to St. Albans; says Mr. Jarndyce in Chapter XXXV, to Esther:

Little Miss Flite, hearing a rumour that you were ill, made nothing of walking down here—twenty miles, poor soul, in a pair of dancing shoes—to inquire. It was Heaven's mercy we were at home, or she would have walked back again.

There is a reference to St. Albans in *The Uncommercial Traveller*, in a paper entitled "Tramps," when Dickens talks of a request of one of this variety to be directed to Brighton.

A matter of some difficulty at the moment, seeing that the request comes suddenly upon you in the depths of Hertfordshire. The more you endeavour to indicate where Brighton is . . . the less the devoted father can be made to comprehend . . . whereby, being reduced to extremity, you recommend the faithful parent to begin by going to St. Albans, and present him with half-a-crown. It does him good, no doubt, but scarcely helps him forward, since you find him lying drunk that same evening in the wheelwright's sawpit under the shed where the felled trees are opposite the sign of the Three Jolly Hedgers.

In *David Copperfield* we are told on one occasion that Steerforth had gone away with one of his Oxford friends to see another who lived near St. Albans, and in *Pickwick* in the illustration of the story of Gabriel Grub, the Abbey depicted bears a decided resemblance to St. Albans Abbey, although the old clergyman who told the tale refers to the Abbey as being in Kent.

Rothamsted, five miles from St. Albans, has an interesting connection with Dickens. Here Sir John Bennet Lawes the famous scientist established a working men's club to enable the agricultural labourer to enjoy his beer and his pipe apart from the public house. This naturally interested Dickens and he visited Mr. Lawes, as he then was, and saw over the club. The outcome of the visit was the article "The poor man and his beer" in *All the Year Round* in 1859.

VI

It is thought that Dunstable was probably the town Dickens had in mind when finding a refuge for Barnaby and his mother as described in Chapter XLV of *Barnaby Rudge*. He says:

In a small English country town, the inhabitants of which supported themselves by the labour of their hands in plaiting and preparing straw for those who made bonnets and other articles of dress and ornaments from that material . . . dwelt Barnaby and his mother. Their hut—for it was little more, stood on the outskirt of the town at a short distance from the high road.

Here it was of course that the blind man Stagg tracked them out and obtained money from Mrs. Rudge.

Towcester, 26½ miles distant from Dunstable, is our next place of interest, and we realise that we are now on that part of the road traversed in the last recorded journey of the Pickwickians.

From Bristol Mr. Pickwick had hired a carriage for the purpose of again visiting Mr. Winkle Senior in Birmingham—and an account of the joyous progress of the party, with Bob Sawyer and Sam Weller singing “duets in the dicke;” is given on page 93. Their arrival in Birmingham is referred to later on in the present chapter.

They returned to London in the rain, but were unable to complete the journey in the day. “At the end of each stage it rained harder than it had done at the beginning.”

“I say,” remonstrated Bob Sawyer, looking in at the coach window, as they pulled up before the door of the Saracen’s Head, Towcester, “this won’t do, you know.”
“Bless me!” said Mr. Pickwick, just awaking from a nap, “I’m afraid you’re wet.”

Bob Sawyer was indeed so wet that “his whole apparel shone so . . . that it might have been mistaken for a full set of prepared oilskin.”

“I think it’s quite impossible to go on to-night,” interposed Ben.

“Out of the question, sir,” remarked Sam Weller, coming to assist in the conference: “it’s a cruelty to animals, sir, to ask ‘em to do it. There’s beds here, sir,” said Sam addressing his master, “everything clean and comfortable. Very good little dinner, sir, they can get ready in half an hour—pair of fowls, sir, and a weal cutlet; French beans, ‘tatars, tart, and tidiness. You’d better stop vere you are, sir, if I might recommend. Take adwice, sir, as the doctor said.”

The host of the Saracen’s Head opportunely appeared at this moment, to confirm Mr. Weller’s statement relative to the accommodations of the establishment, and to back his entreaties with a variety of dismal conjectures regarding the state of the roads, the doubt of fresh horses being to be had at the next stage, the dead certainty of its raining all night, the equally mortal certainty of its clearing up in the morning, and other topics of inducement familiar to innkeepers.

The Saracen’s Head at Towcester had been known since 1831 as the Pomfret Arms, but with this exception, it is the

same inn as it was when the Pickwickians welcomed it as a haven.

The candles were brought, the fire was stirred up, and a fresh log of wood thrown on. In ten minutes' time, a waiter was laying the cloth for dinner, the curtains were drawn, the fire was blazing brightly, and everything looked (as everything always does, in all decent English inns) as if the travellers had been expected, and their comforts prepared, for days beforehand.

Here they encountered Mr. Pott of the Eatanswill *Gazette*, who was on his way to a Political Ball at Birmingham.

"Now, some demon of discord, flying over the Saracen's Head" Dickens informs us, beheld the rival Slurk "established comfortably by the kitchen fire," and prompted Bob Sawyer—who was cold, the fire in their room having gone out, to remark, "It wouldn't be a bad notion to have a cigar by the kitchen fire." So forth they went, when Pott and Slurk encountered one another, with the result that the services of Mr. Weller had to be demanded in order to restore peace, and a pitched battle was the result, in which the carpet bag, fire shovel and meal bag played important parts.

Between Coventry and Towcester (see page 152) Sam Weller had beguiled the party with his dissertation on Post-boys and Donkeys: "Never . . . see a dead post-boy, did you? . . . No nor never vill; and there's another thing that no man never see, and that's a dead donkey."

Expiating upon this learned and remarkable theory, and citing many curious statistical and other facts in its support, Sam Weller beguiled the time until they reached Dunchurch, where a dry postboy and fresh horses were procured; the next stage was Daventry, and the next Towcester; and at the end of each stage it rained harder than it had done at the beginning.

Daventry, of which only a bare mention is made in the above, was the town where the coach bearing Dickens and Phiz left the main road, the Birmingham road, and reached Leamington direct, a saving of eleven miles from the route we are taking.

The next town on the road is Dunchurch, also briefly mentioned in *The Pickwick Papers*, and from there the road to Rugby branches off to the right, and in $2\frac{1}{2}$ miles we reach the town immortalised by Dickens in one of his *Christmas Stories*, as Mugby Junction.

The origin of Mugby Junction is told by Dolby, Dickens's manager for the reading tours, in the following words :

"On this journey a slight accident to the train led to a circumstance which gave Mr. Dickens an opportunity, for which he had long been looking, to write with the object of improving the commissariat at railway stations, which, it may be within the experience of my readers, was at that time conducted in a most unsatisfactory manner. On the arrival of the train at Rugby, it was discovered that the carriage in which we were travelling was on fire. Futile efforts were made to extinguish the flames, and it was at last found necessary to transfer the passengers to another carriage, and, with this view, to detach the burning one from the train, and replace it by another. Mr. Dickens, not being aware of this, had entered the refreshment room with Mr. Wills to get some coffee. While I was busy superintending the transfer of the light baggage, Mr. Dickens came along the platform in a state of great excitement, and requested me to accompany him to the refreshment-room. Then, standing in the doorway, and pointing with his finger, he described the picture he particularly wished to impress on my mind. 'You see, Dolby—stove to right hand—torn cocoanut matting on floor—counter across room—coffee-urn—tea-urn—plates of rusks—piles of sawdust, sandwiches and shrunken-up oranges—bottles—tumblers—and glasses on counter—and, *behind* counter, *note particularly* OUR MISSIS. . . .'

"When the train was fairly off again, Mr. Dickens proceeded to explain. Entering the refreshment-room, he and Mr. Wills had each asked for a cup of coffee, which was supplied to them. While Wills was feeling in his pocket for some small change wherewith to pay, Mr. Dickens reached across the counter for the sugar and milk, when both articles were suddenly snatched away from him and placed beneath the counter, while his ears were greeted with the remark, made in shrill and shrewish tones, 'You sha'n't have any milk and sugar 'till you two fellows have paid for your coffee.'

"This speech was delivered by the woman whom he had pointed out to me as 'our Missis,' and it gave infinite amusement to a page in buttons, who, with that demoniacal spirit which seems to seize some boys at the idea of somebody else 'catching it,' was so overjoyed that he burst out into an uncontrollable fit of laughter. The discomfited travellers left their coffee on the counter, after an apology for making

so free with the sugar-basin. But it was an evil day for that 'buttons,' for he figured as 'The Boy at Mugby' in the next Christmas number of *All the Year Round*."

Up in a corner of the Down Refreshment Room at Mugby Junction, in the height of twenty-seven cross draughts (I've often counted 'em while they brush the First-Class hair twenty-seven ways), behind the bottles, among the glasses, bounded on the nor'west by the beer, stood pretty far to the right of a metallic object that's at times the tea-urn and at times the soup-tureen, according to the nature of the last twang imparted to its contents which are the same groundwork, fended off from the traveller by a barrier of stale sponge-cakes erected atop of the counter, and lastly exposed sideways to the glare of Our Missis's eye—you ask a Boy so situated, next time you stop in a hurry at Mugby, for anything to drink; you take particular notice that he'll try to seem not to hear you, that he'll appear in a absent manner to survey the Line through a transparent medium composed of your head and body, and that he won't serve you as long as you can possibly bear it. That's me.

Mugby Junction, "the maddest place in England" according to Barbox Brothers, is described as

A windy place . . . a place replete with shadowy shapes . . . in the black hours of the four-and-twenty. Mysterious goods trains, covered with palls and gliding on like vast weird funerals, conveying themselves guiltily away from the presence of the few lighted lamps, as if their freight had come to a secret and unlawful end. Half-miles of coal pursuing in a Detective manner, following when they lead, stopping when they stop, backing when they back. Red-hot embers showering out upon the ground, down this dark avenue, and down the other, as if torturing fires were being raked clear.

"Oh yes, there's a town, sir! Anyways, there's town enough to put up in," volunteered Lamps and accordingly in "the deadest and buriedest time" of night, Lamps trundled "on a truck through a silent street" the two large black portmanteaus bearing "the legend 'Barbox Brothers' in large white letters on two black surfaces."

And when the owner of the legend had shivered on the pavement half an hour, what time the porter's knocks at the Inn door knocked up the whole town first, and

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the Inn last, he groped his way into the close air of a shut-up house, and so groped between the sheets of a shut-up bed that seemed to have been expressly refrigerated for him when last made.

This inn at which Barbox Brothers subsequently announced "that he was going to stay on for the present" so as to improve his acquaintance with the Junction, has not been located. Indeed it is probable that Dickens never visited more of Rugby than is compassed by the railway station, so it is vain to seek for the cottages up "a gentle hill of some extent," where at a low window, although the upper, of a cottage that had "but a story of one room above the ground" Phœbe could be seen with "a very bright face, lying on one cheek on the window-sill." It is likewise idle to seek for the house which Barbox Brothers ultimately took to live in to be convenient for the friends he had made at the Junction.

It was the convenient place to live in, for being joined at will to all sorts of agreeable places and persons. So he became settled there, and, his house standing in an elevated situation, it is noteworthy of him in conclusion as Polly herself might (not irreverently) have put it:

There was an Old Barbox who lived on a hill,
And if he ain't gone, he lives there still.

VIII

When Dickens and Phiz went to Leamington, their coach branched off from the Birmingham Road, at Daventry, making direct for Leamington, seventeen miles distant, instead of through Coventry and Kenilworth; a saving of eleven miles.

We cannot agree with some of the writers who have gone before in accepting Coventry as the town where Little Nell showed the figures in Mrs. Jarley's Wax Work, in spite of the fact that one of its two remaining gateways is locally known as Little Nell's Gateway; in this we are pleased that the Librarian of the City of Coventry concurs. Writing in the "Coventry Herald" for December 15th, 1922, he emphatically states, after examination of all the points and claims, that, much as he would like it to be otherwise, Dickens was not thinking of Coventry when writing the story.

Coventry however must not be overlooked in the England of Dickens, as it was here in December 1857 that Dickens gave one of his unpaid readings in aid of the local Mechanics' Institute, prior to embarking on a series of readings for his own personal benefit. The reading was given in the Corn Exchange, now the Empire Theatre.

An interesting outcome of the reading was a presentation made to him on December 4th of the following year, at a public Dinner held at the Castle Hotel, which used to be in ~~gate~~, of a gold watch as a mark of gratitude for his reading of *A Christmas Carol*. It was a gold repeater of special construction which Dickens, in his speech acknowledging the gift, declared "that it should be thenceforward the inseparable companion of his workings and wanderings, and reckon off the future labours of his days until he should have done with the measurement of time."

In his will, he left this watch as a special item, to his friend and biographer John Forster.

It was at Coventry, 18½ miles from Birmingham that the Pickwickians made their first stop to change horses, on their remarkably wet ride to London. (See pages 148-9).

When they stopped to change at Coventry, the steam ascended from the horses in such clouds as wholly to obscure the hostler, whose voice was however heard to declare from the mist, that he expected the first Gold Medal from the Humane Society on their next distribution of rewards, for taking the postboy's hat off.

The name of the hotel is not mentioned, but it may possibly have been the Castle above referred to.

IX

Kenilworth was visited by Dickens and Phiz from Leamington, where they had stayed the night, as he wrote to his wife:

We started in a post chaise next morning for Kenilworth, with which we were both enraptured, and where I really think we must have lodgings next summer, please God that we are in good health and all goes well. You cannot conceive how delightful it is. To read among the ruins in fine weather would be a perfect luxury.

In his diary we find the following entry at this time :

Away to Kenilworth—delightful—beautiful beyond expression. Mem: what a summer resort—three months lie about the ruins—books—thinking—seriously turn this over next year.

But next year saw him spending his summer holidays at Broadstairs, and so far as we know Kenilworth was forgotton until *Dombey and Son* was written some eight years later, when Mr. Dombey whilst visiting Leamington commissioned Major Bagstock to take a note to Mrs. Skewton begging her “and her amiable and accomplished daughter” to accompany them for a ride to Kenilworth. Even then the charms of Kenilworth are dismissed in a few words:

A stroll among the haunted ruins of Kenilworth and more rides to more points of view; most of which, Mrs. Skewton reminded Mr. Dombey, Edith had already sketched, as he had seen in looking over her drawings; brought the day’s expedition to a close.

x

When Dickens arrived at Leamington with Phiz on the 29th October, 1838, he put up at Copp’s Royal Hotel (demolished a few years after his visit), where he afterwards lodged Mr. Dombey, and here, as he wrote to his wife :

We found a roaring fire, and elegant dinner, a snug room and capital beds all ready for us at Leamington, after a very agreeable but very cold ride.

Mr. Dombey and the Major went to Leamington by train as far as Birmingham, the London to Birmingham railway having been opened in 1838 and Chapter XX of *Dombey and Son* contains an account of a journey by rail; but interesting as it is, one can see that Dickens’s heart was not in this mode of travelling; the road of iron had no romance for him.

Away with a shriek and a roar, and a rattle, through the fields, through the woods, through the corn, through the hay, through the chalk, through the clay, through the rock, among objects close at hand, and almost in the grasp, ever flying from the traveller, and a deceitful distance ever moving slowly with him; like as in the track of the remorseless monster, Death.

At Birmingham “Post horses were harnessed and the carriage ready” to take them to their destination, and when evening came on it found them

trotting through the green and leafy road near Leamington . . . to the Royal Hotel, where rooms and dinner had been ordered.

The next morning in the vicinity of the Pump Room, Mrs. Granger and her daughter Edith were encountered, with the result that all readers of the book know full well.

On the next day but one Mr. Dombey and the Major encountered the Honourable Mrs. Skewton and her daughter in the Pump Room, on the day after that they met them again very near the place where they had met them first.

Subsequently a visit was paid to Mrs. Skewton's lodgings which were "fashionable enough and dear enough, but rather limited in point of space and conveniences; so that the Honourable Mrs. Skewton being in bed had her feet in the window and her head in the fire-place."

The maid was "quartered in a closet within the drawing room, so extremely small, that, to avoid developing the whole of its accommodation, she was obliged to writhe in and out of the door like a beautiful serpent."

Dickens gave two readings in Leamington on November 2nd, 1858, and wrote, "Little Leamington is represented as the dullest and worst of audiences, I found it very good indeed, even in the morning."

His second—and last—visit to the town was on January 1st, 1862, when he again read in the same hall, the Music Hall, Bath Street.

XI

Of Warwick, Dickens wrote to his wife on November 1st, 1838 :

We went on to Warwick Castle, which is an ancient building, newly restored and possessing no very great attraction beyond a fine view and some beautiful pictures.

Eight years later it proved a great attraction to Mr. Dombey who took Mrs. Skewton and her daughter Edith for a ride there from Leamington.

"The Castle is charming" said Mrs. Skewton, "associations of the Middle Ages—and all that—which is so truly exquisite."

Edith confessed to have been to Warwick several times, but that did not deter her mother from expressing her desire that they should accompany Mr. Dombey:

"You are like your cousin Feenix, my dearest Edith" said Mrs. Skewton. "He has been to Warwick fifty times, if he has been there once, yet if he came to Leamington tomorrow . . . he would make his fifty second visit next day."

Accordingly after breakfast they started off, Mr. Dombey, the two ladies and Major Bagstock occupying seats in a barouche, and Mr. Carker on horseback cantering at the rear "watching it, during the ride as if he were a cat indeed, and its four occupants, mice."

When they arrived at Warwick,

Mrs. Skewton was bent on taking charge of Mr. Carker herself and showing him the beauties of the Castle . . . "Those darling bygone times Mr. Carker" said Cleopatra "with their delicious fortresses, and their dear old dungeons, and their delightful places of torture, and their romantic vengeances, and their picturesque assaults and sieges, and everything that makes life truly charming. How dreadfully we have degenerated."

"They make the tour of the pictures," we are told, "the crow's nest, and so forth" and

Mrs. Skewton . . . was in such ecstasies with the works of art, after the first quarter of an hour, that she could do nothing but yawn (they were such perfect inspirations, she observed as a reason for that mark of rapture). . . . Warwick Castle being at length pretty well exhausted . . . the carriage was again put in requisition and they rode to several admired points of view in the neighbourhood.

XII

From Warwick the two illustrious travellers made for the great shrine at Stratford-on-Avon, as Dickens wrote at the time :

And thence to Stratford-on-Avon, where we sat down in the room where Shakespeare was born, and left our autographs and read those of other people, and so forth.

They stayed in Stratford the night and in the morning paid the bill amounting to £2 10s. but the name of the inn was not recorded in the diary. The Railway between London and Birmingham had only lately been opened, and it is interesting

to note that Dickens wrote to his wife a day or two later that he had been rather unwell and added "If I had not got better at Stratford, I should have turned back to Birmingham and come straight home by the railroad."

This is the first reference Dickens made to travelling by the railway.

This very visit was reflected soon after in Chapter XXVII of *Nicholas Nickleby*, where Mrs. Nickleby relates:

Soon after I was married I went to Stratford . . . in a post chaise from Birmingham . . . and after we had seen Shakespeare's tomb and birthplace, we went back to the inn there, where we slept that night, and I recollect that all night long I dreamt of nothing but a black gentleman, at full length, in p aster of Paris, with a lay down collar tied with two tassels, leaning against a post and thinking, and when I woke in the morning and described him to Mr. Nickleby, he said it was Shakespeare just as he had been when he was alive, which was very curious indeed.

Dickens's Diary entry on this occasion was,

Stratford—Shakespeare—the birthplace, visitors, scribblers, old woman—Qy, whether she knows what Shakespeare did, etc.

Forster says that in 1839, Dickens "diligently attended the meetings of the Shakespeare Society with Thackeray, Talfourd, Douglas Jerrold, Stanfield, Macleise and others," and indulged in "after dinner oratory."

In 1848 Dickens took a lead on the Committee formed to purchase Shakespeare's birthplace, and some of the "splended strolling" acting was done for its benefit. Dickens visited Stratford in this year, and stayed at the Red Horse Hotel; and signatures of members of his acting company, as well as his own, are in the church album for that year.

In 1852 his name again appears in the visitor's book at the birthplace.

XIII

From Stratford-on-Avon Dickens and Phiz found it impracticable to get direct to Shrewsbury by way of Bridgnorth as there were no coaches; "So we were compelled," he wrote to his wife from Shrewsbury, "to come here by way of Birmingham and Wolverhampton, starting at eight o'clock through a cold wet fog, and travelling, when the day had

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cleared up, through miles of cinder paths, and blazing furnaces, and roaring steam engines, and such a mass of dirt, gloom, and misery, as I never before witnessed."

It is very probable however that Dickens had visited Birmingham at least prior to, or during, the writing of *The Pickwick Papers*, for towards the end of the travels of Mr. Pickwick and his friends, they made a journey to Birmingham for the express purpose of visiting Mr. Winkle Senior in respect to his son's love affair with Arabella Allen.

The boisterous ride of the party from Bristol to Birmingham and thence to London is dealt with elsewhere (see pages 93 and 148) but of their coming into Birmingham we read:

It was quite dark when Mr. Pickwick roused himself sufficiently to look out of the window. The straggling cottages by the roadside, the dingy hue of every object visible, the murky atmosphere, the paths of cinders and brick-dust, the deep red glow of furnace fires in the distance, the volumes of dense smoke issuing heavily forth from high toppling chimneys, blackening and obscuring everything around; the glare of distant lights, the ponderous waggons which toiled along the road, laden with flashing rods of iron, or piled with heavy goods—all betoken their rapid approach to the great working town of Birmingham.

They "rattled through the narrow thoroughfares leading to the heart of the turmoil" and drove briskly "through the open streets, and past the handsome and well-lighted shops which intervene between the outskirts of the town and the Old Royal Hotel."

The Old Royal Hotel, considerably altered externally, still exists in Temple Row.

On their arrival at the Royal Hotel they were shown into a comfortable apartment, and Mr. Pickwick at once propounded a question to the waiter concerning the whereabouts of Mr. Winkle's residence :

"Close by, sir," said the waiter, "not about five hundred yards, sir. Mr. Winkle is a wharfinger, sir, at the canal, sir. Private residence is not—oh dear no, sir, *not* five hundred yards, sir."

The district of the Old Wharf is doubtless that referred to, and the house almost adjacent to the Old Wharf at the corner of Easy Row and Edmund Street which, together with parts of the Old Wharf itself was demolished some years ago, used to be called Mr. Winkle's house.

Dickens describes the house as follows:

About a quarter of a mile off, in a quiet, substantial-looking street, stood an old red-brick house with three steps before the door, and a brass plate upon it, bearing in fat Roman capitals, the words, "Mr. Winkle." The steps were very white, and the bricks were very red, and the house was very clean; and here stood Mr. Pickwick, Mr. Benjamin Allen, and Mr. Bob Sawyer, as the clock struck ten.

The party was viewed somewhat askance by the servant maid, but ultimately ushered into :

"A floor-clothed back parlour, half office and half dressing-room, in which the principal useful and ornamental articles of furniture, were a desk, a wash-hand stand, a shaving glass . . . a high stove, four chairs, a table, and an old eight day clock."

According to photograph is the demolished house at the corner of Easy Row had six steps before the door, whereas Mr. Winkle's had only three, and another claimant has now come forward who occupies the premises at No. 11, which has the necessary three steps and therefore claims to be the original.

In April 1840, Dickens with his wife were again in the Midlands and Forster joined them and recounts an amusing incident:

The day of the first publication of *Master Humphrey* (Saturday, April 4th), had by this time come, and according to the rule observed in his two other great ventures, he left town with Mrs. Dickens on Friday the 3rd. With Maclise we had been together at Richmond the previous night; and I joined him at Birmingham the day following, with news of the sale of the whole sixty thousand copies to which the first working had been limited, and of orders already in hand for ten thousand more! The excitement of the success somewhat lengthened our holiday; and, after visiting Shakespeare's house at Stratford, and Johnson's at Lichfield, we found our resources so straitened in returning, that, employing as our messenger of need his younger brother Alfred, who had joined us from Tamworth where he was a student-engineer, we had to pawn our gold watches at Birmingham.

That they also visited the Black Country between Birmingham and Wolverhampton is evident from a letter of Dickens

to Forster in the October following, when he was writing the account of the flight of Little Nell.

You will recognise a description of the road we travelled between Birmingham and Wolverhampton; but I had conceived it so well in my mind that the execution doesn't please me quite as well as I expected. I shall be curious to know whether you think there's anything in the notion of the man and his furnace-fire.

At about this time there was also an amusing reference in *Master Humphrey's Clock* to a railway journey to Birmingham. The elder Weller thus gave his experiences :

"It wos on the rail; I wos a goin' down to Birmingham by the rail, and I wos locked up in a close carriage with a living widder. Alone we wos; the widder and me wos alone; and I believe it wos only because we *wos* alone and there wos no clergyman in the conwayance, that that 'ere widder didn't marry me afore ve reached the half-way station. Ven I think how she began a screaming as we wos a goin' under them tunnels in the dark—how she kept on a faintin' and ketchin' hold o' me—and how I tried to bust open the door as was tight-locked and perwented all escape—Ah! It was a awful thing, most awful!"

It was by train to Birmingham from London, that Mr. Dombey and Major Bagstock went en route for Leamington, which place was reached by post chaise. (See page 154.)

In addition there are casual references to Birmingham in one or two other books.

Dickens made many public appearances in Birmingham, the first being on February 28th, 1844, when he presided at a meeting at the Town Hall and spoke in support of the fund then being raised for the newly founded Polytechnic.

Four years later, on June 6th, 1848, Dickens and his Company of Splended Strollers appeared at the Theatre Royal in New Street in aid of the funds for the endowment of Shakespeare's House at Stratford-on-Avon. He appeared as Captain Bobadil in "Every Man in His Humour" and also as the Doctor in the farce, "Animal Magnetism."

On June 27th in the same year, a second performance was given for the same object, Dickens playing the part of Justice Shallow in "The Merry Wives of Windsor."

Another four years later Dickens again appeared as an actor in Birmingham; this time in connection with the Guild

of Literature and Art, in which he and Lord Lytton were so interested. They played "Not so Bad as we Seem" at the Town Hall on May 12th, 1852, in addition to Dickens's own farce, "Mr. Nightingale's Diary."

In the January of 1853 a "Banquet in honour of Literature and Art" was given at the Old Royal Hotel, then known as Dee's Hotel, at which Dickens replied to the toast of "The Literature of England," and later in the evening proposed the toast "The Educational Institutions of Birmingham." Prior to the Banquet, Dickens was the recipient, at the rooms of the Society of Arts, then existing in Temple Row, of a Salver, and a diamond ring "as a sincere testimony of their appreciation of his varied literary acquirements, and of the genial philosophy and high moral teaching which characterize his writings."

It was after the banquet that he offered to give his first public reading in aid of the funds for the building of the Birmingham and Midland Institute, to the west of the Town Hall.

In a letter confirming this offer he wrote "There would be some novelty in the thing, as I have never done it in public, though I have in private, and (if I may say so) with a great effect on the hearers."

Forster tells us that in the following December Dickens "kept his promise to his Birmingham friends by reading in their Town Hall his *Christmas Carol* on the 27th, and his *Cricket on the Hearth* on the 29th. The enthusiasm was great, and he consented to read his Carol a second time, on Friday the 30th, if seats were reserved for working men at prices within their means."

To Mrs. Watson he wrote of this occasion.

I was heartily pleased with the Birmingham audience, which was a very fine one. I never saw, nor do I suppose anybody ever did, such an interesting sight as the working people's night. There were two thousand five hundred of them there, and a more delicately observant audience it is impossible to imagine. They lost nothing, misinterpreted nothing, followed everything closely, laughed and cried with most delightful correctness and animated me to that extent that I felt as if we were all bodily going up into the clouds together.

The result was an addition of between four and five hundred pounds to the funds for establishment of the new Institute; and a prettily worked flower-basket in silver, presented to Mrs. Dickens, commemorated these first public readings

"to nearly six thousand people" and the design they had generously helped.

The presentation was made at a breakfast held at the Hen and Chickens Hotel in New Street on the Saturday following his last reading.

Dickens's next visit to Birmingham was as a paid reader in 1858, when on October 18th, he appeared at the Music Hall in Broad Street, now converted into the Prince of Wales Theatre. He appeared here for three nights, giving three selections each night occupying a little over two hours.

On October 26th 1859, he gave a one night reading also at the same place, and he was again reading at the Music Hall on the 30th and 31st December, 1861.

In 1866, on May 10th, he appeared as a reader at the Town Hall, when a curious blunder was made, as he wrote to Miss Hogarth at the time.

— We had a tremendous hall at Birmingham last night, £230 odd, 2100 people; and I made a most ridiculous mistake. Had *Nickleby* on my list to finish with, instead of *Trial*. Read *Nickleby* with great go, and the people remained. Went back again at 10 o'clock, and explained the accident; but said if they liked I would give them the *Trial*. They did like;—and I had another half hour of it in that enormous place.

On February 13th 1867, he was again at the Town Hall and his Farewell readings were given at the same place on the 1st and 2nd April, 1869.

This was not his last visit to Birmingham, for on September 27th 1869, he delivered his inaugural address at the Town Hall as President of the Institute for which he had given his first public reading. Then in the following year, on the 6th January, he distributed the prizes to the successful students at the Institute.

Dickens first became acquainted with Wolverhampton during the late autumn of 1838 when accompanied by Hablot K. Browne (Phiz) he visited it in the tour to which we have already referred. They had been to Leamington, Warwick, Kenilworth and Stratford-on-Avon and finding it impracticable to get from Stratford to Shrewsbury by way of Bridgnorth, as there were no coaches, Dickens wrote to his wife from the Lion Hotel, Shrewsbury on November 1st, 1838:

We were compelled to come here by way of Birmingham and Wolverhampton, starting at eight o'clock through a cold, wet fog, and travelling, when the day had cleared up, through miles of cinder paths and blazing furnaces and roaring steam engines, and such a mass of dirt, gloom, and misery, as I have never before witnessed.

In Dickens's Diary for 1838, now in the Victoria and Albert Museum, and not published in any complete form, there is this reference under date October 31st:

Journey to Shrewsbury—Birmingham—Factory Road—White Lion.

Kitton, in "The Dickens Country," on the authority of this Diary, says that Dickens spent the night at the White Lion, in Factory Road, Wolverhampton. This is not correct, as the Diary clearly shows that the day of October 31st was spent in travelling from Stratford-on-Avon to Birmingham (where 4s. was spent in mulled wine!) and thence to Shrewsbury, where, as confirmed by the letter written to his wife on November 1st, the night was spent. There is no Factory Road in Wolverhampton—nor was there one in 1838. The note "Factory Road" is surely a description of the road between Birmingham and Wolverhampton; and the meaning of "White Lion," if it is not a note of the inn at Shrewsbury where he stayed (actually the Lion) may possibly refer to the White Lion Inn at Wolverhampton where a meal may have been taken.

This hostelry stood next door to the present Town Hall, which itself was built on the site of an old inn, the Red Lion, which ceased to exist as an inn at about the very time Dickens visited the town.

The journey was continued via Tong to Shrewsbury, and Tong, as we all know, has been immortalised as the last resting-place of Little Nell. •

In April, 1840, on the publication of the first part of *Master Humphrey's Clock*, Dickens and his wife, in accordance with a rule he had observed with his two previous publications, went for a holiday into the Midlands, being joined at Birmingham by his friend and biographer, John Forster, and together they visited Stratford and Lichfield.

It is highly probable, too, that Wolverhampton was again visited in this excursion, and Tong, too, perhaps, for later on, when writing the account of the flight of Little Nell in the October following, he wrote to Forster: "You will

recognise a description of the road we travelled between Birmingham and Wolverhampton."

Dickens's first public appearance in Wolverhampton was as a reader in 1858; but in the meantime he had visited the town again at about Christmas, 1853, probably at the time when he gave his first reading of *A Christmas Carol* at Birmingham, in aid of the funds of the Birmingham and Midland Institute.

The result of this visit was the article entitled "Fire and Snow," contributed to *Household Words* on January 21st, 1854, and rescued from oblivion a few years ago by my friend, Mr. B. W. Matz, and now republished in the volume entitled *Miscellaneous Papers*.

He came by train from Birmingham and this is how the town presented itself to him on his arrival:

Snow, wind, ice, and Wolverhampton—all together. No carriage at the station, everything snowed up. So much the better. The Swan will take us under its warm wing, walking or riding. Where is the Swan's nest? In the market-place. So much the better yet, for it is market-day, and there will be something to see from the Swan's nest.

Up the streets of Wolverhampton, where the doctor's bright door-plate is dimmed as if Old Winter's breath were on it, and the lawyer's office window is appropriately misty, to the market-place; where we find a cheerful bustle and plenty of people—for the most part pretending not to like the snow, but liking it very much, as people generally do.

The Swan is a bird of a good substantial brood, worthy to be a country cousin of the hospitable Hen and Chickens, whose company we have deserted for only a few hours and with whom we shall roost again at Birmingham to-night. The Swan has bountiful coal-country notions of firing, snug homely rooms, cheerful windows looking down upon the clusters of snowy umbrellas in the market-place, and on the chaffering and chattering which is pleasantly hushed by the thick white down lying so deep, and softly falling still. Neat bright-eyed waitresses do the honours of the Swan. The Swan is confident about its soup, is troubled with no distrust concerning cod-fish, speaks the word of promise in relation to an enormous chine of roast beef, one of the dishes at "the Ironmasters' dinner," which will be disengaged at four. The Ironmasters'

dinner! It has an imposing sound. We think of the Ironmasters joking, drinking to their Ironmistresses, clinking their glasses with a metallic ring, and comporting themselves at the festive board with the might of men who have mastered Iron.

The Swan is, alas, no more. It stood in a corner of what was once called High Green and is now Queen Square. Lloyds Bank was built upon its site in 1878, and the effigy of the Swan that used to adorn its portal was removed to the Peacock in Snow Hill, where it can still be seen, and although the sign of this latter inn is painted up as the Peacock, it is known locally by all as the Swan and Peacock.

Before having dinner at the Swan, Dickens went for a walk into the beautiful country which lies to the north-west of the town, in the direction of Shrewsbury, through the village of Tettenhall, made all the more beautiful by the mantle of snow which had fallen upon it.

Now for a walk! Not in the direction of the furnaces, which we will see to-night when darkness shall set off the fires; but in the country with our faces towards Wales. Say, ye hoary finger-post, whereon the name of picturesque old Shrewsbury is written in characters of frost.

Down to the solitary factory in the dip of the road, deserted of holiday-makers, and where the water-mill is frozen up—then turn. As we draw nigh to our bright bird again, the early evening is closing in, the cold increases, the snow deadens and darkens, and lights spring up in the shops. A wet walk, ankle deep in snow the whole way. We must buy some stockings, and borrow the Swan's slippers before dinner.

The stockings he doubtless found at the shop at the corner of Dudley Street, opposite the Swan. It is still a hosier's, and in those days was kept by Edward Gibbs.

"Mibbs keeps everything in the stocking line; Mibbs is the man for our money" he says, after trying in vain for them at Dibbs and at Jibbs. "A very good article it is," says Dickens in conclusion, "a very civil, worthy trader Mibbs is, and may Mibbs increase and multiply."

And so Dickens returned to the Swan, and got into his slippers.

The Swan is rich in slippers—in those good old flip-flap inn slippers which nobody can keep on, which knock double knocks on every stair as their wearer comes downstairs, and fly away over the banisters before they have

brought him to level ground. Rich also is the Swan in wholesome well-cooked dinner, and in tender chine of beef, so brave in size that the mining of all the powerful Ironmasters is but a sufficient outlet for its gravy. Rich in things wholesome and sound and unpretending is the Swan, except that we would recommend the good bird not to dip its beak into its sherry. Under the change from snow and wind to hot soup, drawn red curtains, fire and candle, we observe our demonstrations at first to be very like the engine's at the little station; but they subside, and we dine vigorously—another tribute to a winter walk!

The bill of the Swan is to be commended as not out of proportion to its plumage; and now, our walking shoes being dried and baked, we must get them on somehow—for the rosy driver with his carriage and pair who is to take us among the fires on the blasted heath by Bilston announces from under a few shawls, and the collars of three or four coats, that we must be going. Away we go, obedient to the summons, and, having taken leave of the lady in the Swan's bar opposite the door, who is almost rustled out of her glass case and blown upstairs whenever the door opens, we are presently in outer darkness grinding the snow.

The article concludes with an account of a night ride by carriage through the blazing furnace country between Wolverhampton and Bilston, from which place Dickens took train back into Birmingham.

Of his first Reading in Wolverhampton, on August 11th, 1858, Dickens wrote to his daughter:

A wonderful audience last night at Wolverhampton. If such a thing can be, they were even quicker and more intelligent than the audience I had in Edinburgh. They were so wonderfully good and were so much on the alert this morning at nine o'clock for another reading, that we are going back there at about our Bradford time. I never saw such people and the local agent would take no money and charge no expenses of his own.

This latter fact was later on communicated to John Forster in a letter in which Dickens wrote:

Did I tell you that the agents for our tickets who are also book-sellers, say very generally that the readings decidedly increase the sale of the books they are taken from? We were first told this by a Mr. Parke, a wealthy

old gentleman in a very large way at Wolverhampton who did all the business for love, and would not take a farthing. Since then, we have constantly come upon it.

This Mr. Parke had his place of business in High Street, and lived at The Deanery, where it is said Dickens visited him on the occasion of a subsequent visit.

Dickens stayed at the Swan on the night of this reading, and from it wrote a letter to Wilkie Collins, saying: "This is a stupid letter, but I write it before dressing to read, and you know what a brute I am at such times." Curiously enough the letter is addressed as from the Swan at Worcester; he was at Worcester the night before, and no doubt that was how the error occurred; there is no Swan Hotel in Worcester.

It was during the first visit that "in consequence of the illustrious author honouring the town with his presence" *Oliver Twist* was played at the theatre, with John L. Toole in the part of the Artful Dodger.

The theatre was situated at the bottom of the yard of the Swan; its site is now partly covered by the cinema.

When he paid the promised second visit to the town, on the 3rd November of the same year, he came on there from Leamington, and wrote to Miss Hogarth:

The evening being fine, and blue being to be seen in the sky beyond the smoke, we expect to have a full hall. . . . We came through a part of the Black Country that you know and it looked at its blackest. All the furnaces seemed in full blast, and all the coal-pits to be working. It is market day here, and the ironmasters are standing out in the street (where they always hold high change) making such an iron hum and buzz, that they confuse me horribly. In addition there is a bellman announcing something—not the readings, I beg to say—and there is an excavation being made in the centre of the open place, for a statue, or a pump, or a lamp-post, or something or other, round which all the Wolverhampton boys are yelling and struggling.

This letter was addressed from "Wolverhampton third November 1858," and it is probable that he again stayed at the Swan.

His third reading at Wolverhampton was on January 23rd, 1867, after a very bitter experience at Chester, where the reading was given in a terrible "snowstorm and a fall of ice. . . . It was the worst weather I ever knew" Dickens wrote

at the time. But at Wolverhampton he tells us “the thaw had thoroughly set in and I was again heavily beaten. We came on here (Birmingham) after the reading (it is only a ride of 40 minutes) and it was as much as I could do to hold out the journey.”

Dickens’s farewell reading was on Thursday, March 4th, 1869, on which occasion he wrote to his daughter:

“Immense enthusiasm at Wolverhampton last night over Marigold.”

The readings were given in the Exchange Hall, removed several years ago to make room for the Market.

It was in the streets of Wolverhampton that Little Nell encountered her old friend, the kind schoolmaster, and fell fainting at his feet. Here they stayed a couple of nights and then went forward, by a circuitous route, to Tong, nine and a half miles away. (See page 184).

xv

Through Tong and Shifnal it is thirty-two miles to Shrewsbury, and as we enter the county of Shropshire we call to mind that it was “the man from Shropshire” who figured rather largely in *Bleak House*, and who was considered the “best joke of the Courts of Chancery.”

Dickens and Phiz arrived at Shrewsbury on October 31st, 1838. It was only for a short stay, as they left the next day for Llangollen. They put up at the Lion Hotel, from which Dickens wrote to his wife the account of the journey since leaving London, which we have already quoted. He further wrote:

We got pretty well accommodated here when we arrived at half-past four, and we are now going off in a postchaise to Llangollen—thirty miles—where we shall remain to-night, and where the Bangor mail will take us up to-morrow. Such are our movements up to this point, and when I have received your letter at Chester I shall write you again and tell you when I shall be back. I can positively say that I shall not exceed the fortnight.

We were at the play last night. It was a bespeak—“the Love Chase” a ballet (with a phenomenon) divers songs and “A Roland for an Oliver.” It is a good theatre, but the actors are very funny. Browne laughed with such indecent heartiness at one point of the entertainment, that an old gentleman in the next box suffered the most violent

indignation. The bespeak party occupied two boxes, the ladies were full dressed, and the gentlemen to a man, in white gloves with flowers in their button holes. It amused us mightily, and was as really like the Miss Snevellicci business as it could well be.

Dickens no doubt carried away with him a very good impression of the quaint lath and plaster buildings with which Shrewsbury then abounded and which are still observable to-day, and incorporated them in his description of the last stage of the journey of Little Nell.

Dickens and his amateur company in their Splendid Strolling on behalf of Charity, visited Shrewsbury on May 10th, 1852. When in the town in August, 1858, for the purpose of one of his readings, he wrote to his daughter from the Lion Hotel, a very interesting account of the inn and the old houses, and made a reference to having acted in the same hall as that in which he was to read, as well as to having then stayed in a different hotel. The latter, dated August 12th, 1858, is as follows:

This place looks what Plorn would call “ortily” dull; local agent predicts however “great satisfaction to Mr. Dickens and excellent attendance.” I have just been to look at the hall, where everything was wrong, and where I have left Arthur making a platform for me out of dining-room tables. . . .

Tell Georgy, with my love, that I read in the same room in which we acted, but at the opposite end to that where our stage was. We are not at the inn where the amateur Company put up, but at the Lion, where the fair Miss Mitchell was lodged alone. We have the strangest little rooms (sitting-room and two bedrooms all together) the ceilings of which I can touch with my hand. The windows bulge out over the street, as if they were little stern windows in a ship. And a door opens out of the sitting room on to a little open gallery with plants in it, where one leans over a queer old rail, and looks all downhill and slantwise at the crookedest black and yellow old houses, all manner of shapes except straight shapes. To get into this room we come through a china closet; and the man in laying the cloth has actually knocked down, in that repository, two geraniums and Napoleon Bonaparte.

The play as well as the reading were given in the Music Hall, which is still standing.

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The only mention of Shrewsbury in the novels, has reference to its famous school, and is to be found in *A Tale of Two Cities*, where Stryver thus refers to his old schoolfellow:

“ The old Sydney Carton of Shrewsbury School . . . up one minute and down the next; now in spirits, and now in despondency. . . . Before Shrewsbury and at Shrewsbury and ever since Shrewsbury . . . you have fallen into your rank and I have fallen into mine.”

XVI

It is thirty miles to Llangollen from Shrewsbury, and it was here that Dickens and Phiz stayed at the Hand Hotel the night of November 1st, 1838. The Diary described the journey thus:

Post to Llangollen—pass 2 aqueducts—beautiful road between the mountains—old Abbey at top of mountains. Denis Brien or Rock Castle. Hand Hotel, Mrs. Phillips. Good.

The aqueduct of Pont-y-Lycyltan is seen on the left just before reaching Llangollen and close by is the Valle Crucis Abbey to which Dickens refers.

The next stage of the journey was to Capel Curig, and then the next day the party reached Chester, where apparently the whole of Sunday was spent; but the diary is quite lacking in details, being simply a record of the cost of “ Posting to Bangor £1/1/-. Bill at Capel Curig £1/10/-. Posting to Chester £1/11/6.”

XVII

Chester finds no place in the topography of Dickens's novels; but he read here at the Music Hall, in Northgate Street, now a cinema, on August 13th, 1858, and again on January 30th, 1862, and no' doubt the picturesque and historical old town was previously well known to him; according to a letter to his wife, quoted on page 168, he paid a visit to it during the tour he took with Phiz in the late autumn of 1838, but we do not possess any details.

Dickens was again reading in Chester on January 22nd, 1867, when he “ read in a snowstorm and a fall of ice.” A letter written at the time says, “ I think it was the worst weather I ever saw. Nevertheless the people were enthusiastic.”

On the afternoon of the day of the reading he wrote to his daughter:

I have seldom seen a place look more hopelessly frozen up than this place does. The hall is like a methodist chapel in low spirits and with a cold in its head. . . . This seems to be a very nice hotel, but it is an extremely cold one. . . . The sitting room has two large windows in it, down to the ground, and facing due east. The adjoining bedroom (mine) has also two large windows in it, down to the ground, and facing due east. The very large doors are opposite the large windows, and I feel as if I were something to eat in a pantry.

We are enlightened as to the name of this hotel by George Dolby, Dickens's Business Manager for the Reading Tours. In his book, "Charles Dickens as I Knew Him," Dolby says:

Arrived at Chester, we went to the Queen's Hotel, and here I left Mr. Dickens in what had the appearance of a most comfortable sitting room, with a blazing fire. . . . I had been absent about two hours, and on my return found him sitting on the heart-rug in front of the fire with my Turkish fez on his head, to protect him from a strong draught between the door and a double French window. . . . I asked him how he felt, "Like something good to eat being kept cool in a larder. What do you think I look like?" he asked. "Like an old chief" I replied, "but without his pipe." The idea of his looking like a chief seemed to please him and from that time I always addressed him by that name, which was generally adopted by his associates, and proclaimed as his title in the office of *All the Year Round*.

Chester was again visited—in a private capacity only—in April, 1868, whilst on the reading tour, when he spent a week-end there after reading at Leeds, and prior to a series in the Lancashire towns. Dolby tells us how the sojourn at "Chester, with its old walls and picturesque streets promised a pleasant change," and was indeed very beneficial to the delicate state of Dickens's health, but he had a very bad night there, and this led him to decide to rest on the decision of his medical adviser, which, received a little later at Preston, cancelled the remainder of the readings of the tour.

Dolby gives us an account of the drive taken by Dickens and himself from Chester, to the picturesque town of Mold, during which discussion arose as to the future of the readings and, Dolby tells us, he "had an instinctive feeling that the travelling career was at an end, if not the reading career also."

CHAPTER EIGHT

ON THE TRACK OF LITTLE NELL

I

The journey taken by Little Nell and her grandfather, which occupies so much of the story of *The Old Curiosity Shop*, is naturally the matter of some conjecture: Dickens is absolutely silent as to the names of the places through which they passed, not even assigning fictitious names to them: but it is generally accepted that they journeyed into the Midlands and that Tong in Shropshire was the retreat where the faithful little soul died. The only clue to the direction they took are the references to the Black Country and the Welsh Mountains, given in Chapters XLV and XLVI.

To appreciate fully the reasons why the road through the Midlands, via Aylesbury, Banbury, Warwick, Birmingham, Wolverhampton and Shifnal to Tong should be fixed as the track of the footsteps of Little Nell, we must first consider the knowledge Dickens had of the district.

It was in the autumn of 1838, two years before *The Old Curiosity Shop* was written, that Dickens and Hablot K. Browne, took a bachelor holiday, details of which are preserved in a diary kept by Dickens at the time, to which we have referred at length in Chapter Seven.

They went first to Leamington, and then to Kenilworth, Warwick, Stratford-on-Avon, Birmingham, Wolverhampton, Shrewsbury, Llangollen and Chester. Two years later when writing the chapters relating to the flight of Little Nell and her grandfather through the Black Country, Dickens wrote to Forster (with whom in the April of that year he had visited the Midlands), "You will recognise a description of the road we travelled between Birmingham and Wolverhampton."

Between Wolverhampton and Shrewsbury, Tong would be passed, and we have on record the evidence of Archdeacon Lloyd that Dickens had told him that Tong Church was the one described by him in his account of the death of Little Nell. In addition to this, so notable a church as "The Westminster Abbey of the Midlands," as the church at

Tong is called, would have attracted Dickens, who was fond of visiting such places: for according to a letter to his wife during the previous trip to Yorkshire, he wrote that he would be visiting on the morrow, "a dozen old abbeys" round about Barnard Castle, and although there is nothing on record in the Diary to show that Dickens actually visited Tong, yet we feel almost certain that Tong would not have been missed in the later expedition.

II

Whether the Old Curiosity Shop was situated in Portsmouth Street, or in Green Street or in Fetter Lane, and this also is a matter of conjecture, there does not appear to be much doubt that Little Nell and her grandfather passed along into Holborn.

Arriving in Holborn they turned towards the City where, in the vicinity of Smithfield, the early morning trade recalled to the old man his close proximity to the very things he wished to avoid, caused him to turn due north along, say, St. John Street.

Then they struck across into Bagnigge Wells Road to what is now known as King's Cross.

Again, this quarter passed, they came upon a straggling neighbourhood, where the mean houses parcelled off in rooms. . . . Here were poor streets where faded gentility essayed with scanty space and shipwrecked means to make its last feeble stand.

Their way would now lie along Old Saint Pancras Road into Camden Town, a new district in those days and very familiar to Dickens through his residence there as a boy. The following picture is so true of this end of London as Dickens remembered it, that there is little mistaking it.

This was a wide, wide track—for the humble followers of the camp of wealth pitch their tents round about it for many a mile—but its character was still the same. Damp, rotten houses, many to let, many yet building, many half-built and mouldering away . . . mangling-women, washer-women, cobblers, tailors, chandlers, driving their trades in parlours and kitchens and back rooms and garrets, and sometimes all of them under the same roof—brick-fields skirting gardens paled with staves of old casks, . . . small dissenting chapels to teach, with no lack of illustration, the miseries of Earth, and plenty of new churches, erected with a little superfluous wealth, to show the way to Heaven.

And so they left the Camden Town district behind them and proceeded in the direction of Hampstead.

At length these streets becoming more straggling yet, dwindled and dwindled away, until there were only small garden patches bordering the road. . . . Then, came the public-house; . . . with tea-gardens and a bowling green, spurning its old neighbour with the horse-trough where the waggons stopped; then, fields; and then, some houses, one by one, of goodly size with lawns, . . . then, came a turnpike; then fields again with trees and haystacks; then, a hill; and on the top of that the traveller might stop, and—looking back at old Saint Paul's looming through the smoke, . . . might feel at last that he was clear of London.

By the way they had come it must have been quite six miles to the top of the Heath, where they refreshed themselves by the water hard by.

The journey was resumed along by roads through Cricklewood to Ealing, a very rural district in those days; and and then by the main road through Southall and Hayes to Uxbridge, as Dickens so excellently describes.

They were now in the open country; the houses were very few and . . . often miles apart. Occasionally they came upon a cluster of poor cottages, some with a chair or low board put across the open door to keep the scrambling children from the road, others shut up close while all the family were working in the fields. . . . The farm-yard passed, then came the little inn; the humbler beer-shop; and the village tradesman's. . . . The church then peeped out modestly from a clump of trees; then there were a few more cottages; then the cage, and pound, and not unfrequently, on a bank by the wayside, a deep old dusty well. Then came the trim-hedged fields on either hand, and the open road again. They walked all day, and slept that night at a small cottage where beds were let to travellers.

This was at Uxbridge and the two travellers had completed twenty miles of their journey.

pike road that leads to Banbury, passing through Chalfont St. Peters, Amersham and Wendover, a total distance of twenty and a half miles from Uxbridge.

Next morning they were afoot again, and though jaded at first and very tired, recovered before long and proceeded briskly forward. . . . It was nearly five o'clock in the afternoon, when, drawing near another cluster of labourers' huts, the child looked wistfully in each, doubtful at which to ask for permission to rest awhile, and buy a draught of milk. . . . At length she stopped at one where the family were seated round a table—chiefly because there was an old man sitting in a cushioned chair beside the hearth, and she thought he was a grandfather and would feel for hers.

This was no doubt near Wendover, five miles from Aylesbury, which distance fits in with a later observation. The place must have been a fairly large one with a church, since the old cottager refers to his dead soldier son in these words:

He always said he'd be buried near the sun-dial he used to climb upon when he was a baby, did my poor boy, and his words come true—you can see the place with your own eyes; we've kept the turf up, ever since.

It was "a matter of a good five mile" to the next town or village, and the grandfather urged that they should get there that night. "Further on, further on, darling, further away if we walk till midnight." Thus showing that his readiness to do a "good five mile" after five o'clock at night, with a long day's journey already to his credit, proves that twenty or twenty-five miles a day was not an impossible distance for the elder of the two wanderers.

They had gone for a mile or so, when they got a lift in a cart to the next town, and were put down at a "path . . . leading through the churchyard."

It was Aylesbury they had reached. The present church has been twice restored since that day, once in 1848 and again in 1869.

The old man and the child quitted the gravel path, and strayed among the tombs. . . . As they passed behind the church they heard voices near at hand, and presently came on those who had spoken.

Surprise has often been expressed that Codlin and Short should have been allowed to make such use as they did of a

churchyard. But Aylesbury was particularly notorious in that respect, as Mr. Clement K. Shorter tells us in his "Highways and Byways in Buckinghamshire," where he states: "Tradition tells of a time when Aylesbury Churchyard, now so carefully railed off from the footpaths, was the scene of cockfighting, cardplaying, and other Hogarthian exploits, and when even soldiers were flogged there on occasions. Even up to the beginning of the nineteenth century the elections were held here and the rival candidates addressed their constituents from the tombstones."

It would be hard to locate the public house where they stayed for the night. But it was close at hand, Short informing Nell: "That's it—the long, low white house there. It's very cheap." And later when they had retired to their room, "a loft partitioned into two compartments."

It was at this inn that Codlin and Short performed the immortal drama of *Punch*.

The whole house hurried away into an empty stable where the show stood, and where, by the light of a few flaring candles stuck round a hoop which hung by a line from the ceiling, it was to be forthwith exhibited.

Aylesbury has many old inns, the George, the King's Head, and the White Hart among them, and several smaller ones, too, such as would be frequented by travelling showmen such as this couple.

We cannot accept the claim of Kitton that Bushey was the place where Little Nell encountered Codlin and Short.

In the first place Bushey is only twelve miles from London, and this meeting took place on the second day of the journey, and already early on the first day they had reached the high ground outside London, say five or six miles. They walked fairly well the second day and arrived at a village where the nearest town was "a matter of good five mile." Now Edgware is three miles from Bushey; Bushey is not a "good five mile" from any nearest village. In addition it must be remembered that the travellers got a lift these last five miles so that would leave only about two miles to walk during the whole day.

We cannot help thinking that we are quite correct in assigning to Aylesbury the honour of being the meeting-place in question. It is about 45 miles from London and a little more than half way to Banbury, where the couple were on the fourth day. Kitton conjectures that the town of the races was Warwick, and after assigning to the travellers only twelve

miles the first two days, wonders at their performing so long a journey, nearly one hundred miles, in four days. Now Banbury brings the distances to a more reasonable figure, as it is only 81 miles from London by this route, and in Dickens's day races were held there.

IV

The beginning of the third day found Little Nell up early walking in the churchyard; after breakfast Short informed them: "We're going on to the races. If that's your way and you like to have us for company, let us travel together."

And so they started off for Banbury, which is $30\frac{3}{4}$ miles from Aylesbury by the most direct route. However, it is probable that they took the longer and more populous route by Winslow and Buckingham, as Codlin and Short were desirous of making money on the road. This would make the distance 35 miles, to be covered in two days; and Buckingham is about half way.

When they came to my town or village . . . Short blew a blast upon the brazen trumpet and caroled a fragment of a song in that hilarious tone common to Punches and their consorts. If people hurried to the windows, Mr. Codlin pitched the temple, and hastily unfurling the drapery and concealing Short therewith, flourished hysterically on the pipes and performed an air. . . . Sometimes they played out the toll across a bridge or ferry, and once exhibited by particular desire at a turnpike, where the collector, being drunk in his solitude, paid down a shilling to have it to himself . . . They had stopped to rest beneath a finger-post where four roads met. . . . two monstrous shadows were seen stalking towards them from a turning in the road by which they had come.

This was "Grinder's ~~lot~~" who were undoubtedly met with about a mile this side the town of Buckingham. From this point by the main road it is $18\frac{1}{2}$ miles to Banbury; but there are nearly two miles saved by the road through Westbury and Brackley; this was evidently the route the stilt walkers were taking.

"Which road are you takin'? We go the nighest."

"Why, the fact is," said Short, "that we are going the longest way, because then we could stop for the night, a mile and a half on."

We should consider it likely that "Grinder's Lot" had decided to stay the night at Westbury, $4\frac{1}{2}$ miles from Buckingham. Codlin, however, would not go more than a mile and a half to an inn he knew; he declared he would "put up at the Jolly Sandboys and nowhere else," and so the two parties went their different ways and our wanderers arrived at the Jolly Sandboys.

The Jolly Sandboys was a small road-side inn of pretty ancient date, with a sign, representing three Sandboys increasing their jollity with as many jugs of ale and bags of gold, creaking and swinging on its post on the opposite side of the road.

Unfortunately the identity of the Jolly Sandboys is lost—even supposing that Dickens had any particular inn on the road, in view. But we can recall the curious company assembled at supper, and those who joined them later.

v

On the fourth day, the party covered 16 miles to Banbury.

Meanwhile, they were drawing near the town where the races were to begin next day; . . . On every piece of waste or common ground, some small gambler drove his noisy trade and bellowed to the idle passers-by to stop and try their chance. It was dark before they reached the town itself, and long indeed the few last miles had been. Here all was tumult and confusion; the streets were filled with throngs of people. . . . They at length passed through the town and made for the racecourse, which was upon an open heath, situated on an eminence, a full mile distant from its furthest bounds. . . . After a scanty supper, . . . she and the old man lay down to rest in a corner of a tent and slept despite the busy preparations that were going on around them all night long.

Soon after sunrise, the next day, Nelly was up plucking the wild flowers in the fields to make into nosegays. "I'm going to try to sell some, these three days of the races," she explained.

Codlin aroused the suspicions of Little Nell, by the overtures he made accompanied with the assurances, "Codlin's your friend"; and fearing the Punch and Judy Men would take steps to have them delivered up to their friends, Nell resolved to get away from them at the earliest opportunity:

but both kept her well in sight for the greater part of the day; at length, however, an opportunity presented itself:

They made a path through booths and carriages and throngs of people, . . . and creeping under the brow of the hill at a quick pace, made for the open fields . . . and at length reached the public road. Taking their way along it for a short distance, they came to a lane, . . . A broken finger-post announced that this led to a village three miles off; and thither they resolved to bend their steps.

Warmington, five miles from Banbury, on the main Warwick road, was the village they were now approaching.

The miles appeared so long that they sometimes thought they must have missed their road. But at last, to their great joy, it led downward in a steep descent, with overhanging banks over which the footpaths led; and the clustered houses of the village peeped out from the woody hollow below. It was a very small place. The men and boys were playing at cricket on the green. . . . There was but one old man in the little garden before his cottage, and him they were timid of approaching, for he was the schoolmaster, and had "School" written up over his window in black letters on a white board.

Nell enquired of him to be directed to a shelter for the night, but he was so struck with her youth, that he offered them the hospitality of his own cottage.

The kind schoolmaster befriended the travellers for two nights, Nell endearing herself to all the little village. It was the morning of the seventh day of their travels that they said farewell to the schoolmaster and "turned away, walking slowly and often looking back, until they could see him no more. At length they had left the village far behind, and even lost sight of the smoke among the trees. They trudged onward now, at a quicker pace, resolving to keep the main road, and go wherever it might lead them."

VI

From Warmington it is 14 miles to Warwick and the road is, as Dickens describes it, a long, uninteresting one, with but few villages on the way.

But main roads stretch a long, long way. With the exception of two or three inconsiderable clusters of cottages which they passed, without stopping, and one lonely

roadside public-house where they had some bread and cheese, this highway had led them to nothing. . . . The afternoon had worn away into a beautiful evening, when they arrived at a point where the road made a sharp turn and struck across a common. On the border of this common, and close to the hedge which divided it from the cultivated fields, a caravan was drawn up to rest;

This would probably be Gaydon, nine miles from Warwick; the caravan belonged to the immortal Mrs. Jarley.

Mrs. Jarley informed them that "the town was eight miles off," and seeing that the two travellers were tired and hungry, offered them refreshment, and a lift to the town.

Away they went, with a great noise of flapping and creaking and straining; and the bright brass knocker, which nobody ever knocked at, knocking one perpetual double knock of its own accord as they jolted heavily along.

During the ride, Mrs. Jarley proposed to Nell that she could find employment for her in helping "to dust the figures . . . and to point 'em out to the company."

At midnight they arrived in "the paved streets of a town"—probably Warwick. "As it was too late an hour to repair to the exhibition room, they turned aside into a piece of waste ground that lay just within the old town-gate, and drew up there for the night."

The next morning the caravan went through the town and Nell "peeped from the window, curious to see in what kind of place they were."

It was a pretty large town, with an open square which they were crawling slowly across, and in the middle of which was the Town-Hall, with a clock-tower and a weathercock. There were houses of stone, houses of red brick, houses of yellow brick, houses of lath and plaster; and houses of wood, many of them very old and withered faces carved upon the beams, and staring down into the street.

One of the city gates is described in an adventure where Nell suddenly encountered Quilp.

The moon was shining down upon the old gateway of the town, leaving the low archway very black and dark; . . . There was an empty niche from which some old statue had fallen or been carried away hundreds of years ago, and she was thinking what strange people it must have looked down upon when it stood there, . . . when there

suddenly emerged from the black shade of the arch, a man. The instant he appeared, she recognised him—Who could have failed to recognise, in that instant, the ugly misshapen Quilp! The street beyond was so narrow, and the shadow of the houses on one side of the way so deep, that he seemed to have risen out of the earth. But there he was. The child withdrew into a dark corner, and saw him pass close to her.

The claims of Coventry to be the town where this event happened and where Nell spent some months with Mrs. Jarley and her wax work have been withdrawn by Mr. Charles Nowell, the city Librarian, in an article on the subject in the Coventry Herald for December 15th, 1922.

In describing Miss Monflathers's Boarding Establishment, we cannot help thinking that Dickens had in mind Eastgate House at Rochester, which figured as Miss Twinkleton's Academy in *Edwin Drood*. The description is very similar.

A large house with a high wall, and a large garden-gate with a large brass plate and a small grating through which Miss Monflathers's parlour-maid inspected all visitors before admitting them; for nothing in the shape of a man—no not even a milkman—was suffered, without special licence, to pass that gate.

It has not been possible to identify the Valiant Soldier Inn, which afforded shelter to Nell and her Grandfather, one holiday night.

It was at this inn that the gambling fever again caught hold of the old grandfather—the contents of “Nell’s little purse was exhausted”; and not content with that, later on when they had to sleep there on account of the severity of the storm, the old man stole from her room at night the little money Nell had remaining.

vii

The determination to leave Mrs. Jarley and proceed farther away from the temptation that lurked in noisy towns was arrived at by Little Nell after discovering her grandfather again gambling with Isaac List and his confederates; and this was hastened by her knowledge that an attempt might be made to rob their benefactress, Mrs. Jarley.

She had spent a not unhappy time with the Waxworks, but she left without one word of warning or even a good-bye to Mrs. Jarley.

Through the straight streets, and narrow crooked outskirts, their trembling feet passed quickly. Up the steep hill too, crowned by the old grey castle, they toiled with rapid steps, and had not once looked behind. But as they drew nearer the ruined walls, the moon rose in all her gentle glory, and, from their venerable age, garlanded with ivy, moss, and waving grass, the child looked back upon the sleeping town, deep in the valley's shade, and on the far off river with its winding track of light, and on the distant hills.

Dickens must have had Kenilworth in his mind when writing the above description; it is five miles from Warwick, but hardly in the line of route.

They continued to walk the night through, and it was not until the sun began to shine in the sky that "they laid them down to sleep, upon a bank, hard by some water."

They were awakened by the sound of voices, proceeding from some men in "a long heavy boat which had come close to the bank."

This was on the banks of the Warwick and Birmingham Canal; the men offered them a lift, which was accepted, and Nell and her grandfather were soon "on board, and gliding smoothly down the canal." Canal travel has been ousted by the railway and the motor, and it is of interest to note that this is the only description of travelling by canal that Dickens has given us.

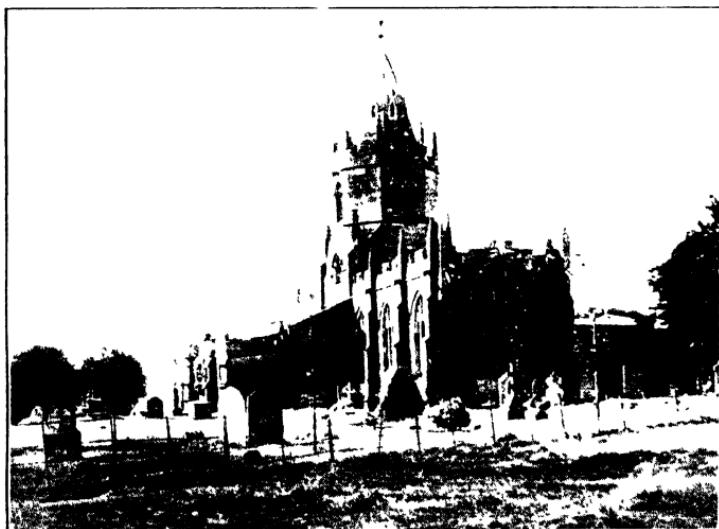
At a kind of wharf late in the afternoon they stopped for a time. Here Nell made a few small purchases and the men after spending some time drinking in the public house, proceeded on their journey, not without bringing on board a quantity of beer and spirits, which resulted in a very uproarious night, during which Nell was reluctantly compelled to sing songs to the three bargemen.

In the afternoon of the next day they arrived at the end of the canal journey, in the very heart of Birmingham.

They had for some time been gradually approaching the place for which they were bound. The water had become thicker and dirtier; . . . the paths of coal-ash and huts of staring brick, marked the vicinity of some great manufacturing town; while scattered streets and houses and smoke from distant furnaces, indicated that they were already in the outskirts. Now, the clustered roofs, and piles of buildings trembling with the working of engines, and dimly resounding with their shrieks and throbings;



KENILWORTH CASTLE



LONG CHURCH

Photos by T. W. Lindt

the tall chimneys vomiting forth a black vapour, which hung in a dense ill-favoured cloud above the housetops and filled the air with gloom; the clank of hammers beating upon iron, the roar of busy streets and noisy crowds; . . . announced the termination of their journey. The boat floated into the wharf to which it belonged. . . . The child and her grandfather . . . passed through a dirty lane into a crowded street and stood amid its din and tumult.

The wharf at which they stopped is usually pointed out as the Old Wharf, the one connected with Mr. Winkle Senior in *Pickwick* and the terminus of the canal from Coventry. The canal from Warwick however passed Bordesley Wharf from which "through a dirty lane" Nell and her grandfather would soon find themselves in "a crowded street" such as High Street or New Street. Mr. G. W. Davis in "The Dickensian" for October 1909 states that several iron furnaces were in those days to be met with in the Stafford Street and Dale End districts and it was no doubt one of these which afforded the travellers shelter for the night, as Dickens goes on to describe.

They did not progress very far that day, but kept to the streets near to the wharf, for we read: "Evening came on. They were still wandering up and down."

Penniless and desolate they "retraced their steps . . ." and went back to the wharf hoping to find "the boat in which they had come, and to be allowed to sleep on board that night. But here again they were disappointed, for the gate was closed, and some fierce dogs, barking at their approach, obliged them to retreat."

But they found "a deep old doorway—very dark, but quite dry and warm too" and here they met the poor furnace watcher who offered them a rest for the night before the furnace fire, in "the poorest and most wretched quarter of the town."

In this strange place and on the heap of ashes Nell "slept as peacefully, as if the room had been a palace chamber, and the bed, a bed of down."

The next morning the man enquired whither they were going.

She told him that they sought some distant country place, remote from towns or even other villages, and with a faltering tongue inquired what road they would do best to take.

"I know little of the country, he said, shaking his head, for such as I pass all our lives before our furnace doors,

and seldom go forth to breath. But there *are* such places yonder."

He showed them then "by which road they must leave the town, and what course they should hold when they had gained it." And so we read that "Though the two travellers proceeded very slowly, they did proceed; and clearing the town in course of time, began to feel that they were fairly on their way."

VIII

And so they tramped through the Black Country.

On every side, and far as the eye could see into the heavy distance, tall chimneys, crowding on each other, and presenting that endless repetition of the same dull, ugly, form, . . . poured out their plague of smoke, obscured the light, and made foul the melancholy air. On mounds of ashes by the way side, sheltered only by a few rough boards, or rotten pent-house roofs, strange engines spun and writhed like tortured creatures; clanking their iron chains, shrieking in their rapid whirl from time to time as though in torment unendurable and making the ground tremble with their agonies. Dismantled houses here and there appeared, tottering to the earth, propped up by fragments of others that had fallen down, unroofed, windowless, blackened, desolate, but yet inhabited.

Although the distance from Birmingham to Wolverhampton is only 13 miles, the travellers were so tired, and the road was so difficult that they were unable to accomplish the distance in one day. The night was spent in the open, "with nothing between them and the sky" and next day they went on "through the same scenes as yesterday, with no variety or improvement. Evening was drawing on, but had not closed in, when—still travelling among the same dismal objects—they came to a busy town.

This was Wolverhampton—although Kitton does not seem to appreciate the fact, and causes Wolverhampton to be passed at a much later period of the journey.

Faint and spiritless as they were, its streets were insupportable. . . . They were dragging themselves along through the last street . . . when . . . there appeared before them, going in the same direction as themselves, a traveller on foot. . . . He turned his head, the child

clapped her hands together, uttered a wild shriek, and fell senseless at his feet.

It was their old friend the schoolmaster, who explained later on,

“I have been appointed clerk and schoolmaster to a village a long way from here—and . . . five and thirty pounds! . . . I am on my way there now. . . . They allowed me the stage-coach hire. . . . But as the time at which I am expected there, left me ample leisure, I determined to walk instead.”

He picked up Little Nell, and ran with her to an inn near by. This was doubtless at the Tettenhall end of Wolverhampton but it is not possible to locate the inn.

There was a small inn within sight, to which, it would seem, he had been directing his steps when so unexpectedly overtaken. Towards his place he hurried with his unconscious burden, and rushing into the kitchen, and calling upon the company there assembled to make way for God’s sake, deposited it on a chair before the fire.

Nell and her grandfather decided to accompany the schoolmaster “to the village whither he was bound” hoping he would be able “to find some humble occupation by which they could subsist.”

IX

The whole of the next day was spent at Wolverhampton while Nell was recovering, and on the evening of the day following

They arranged to proceed upon their journey, as a stage-waggon, which travelled for some distance on the same road as they must take, would stop at the inn to change horses, and the driver for a small gratuity would give Nell a place inside. A bargain was soon struck when the waggon came; and in due time it rolled away; with the child comfortably bestowed among the softer packages, her grandfather and the schoolmaster walking on beside the driver.

Dickens gives us in this forty-sixth chapter of *The Old Curiosity Shop* another of those delightful pictures of leisurely coach travelling which it is well to recall in these days of fast locomotion.

What a soothing, luxurious, drowsy way of travelling, to lie inside that slowly-moving mountain, listening

to the tinkling of the horses' bells, the occasional smacking of the carter's whip, the smooth rolling of the great broad wheels, the rattle of the harness, the cheery good-nights of passing travellers jogging past on little short-stepped horses—all made pleasantly indistinct by the thick awning, which seemed made for lazy listening under, till one fell asleep! . . . The waking from a sound nap as the 'nail came dashing past like a highway comet, with gleaming lamps and rattling hoofs, and visions of a guard behind, standing up to keep his feet warm, and of a gentleman in a fur cap opening his eyes and looking wild and stupefied—the stopping at the turnpike where the man was gone to bed, and knocking at the door until he answered with a smothered shout from under the bedclothes in the little room above.

. . . The cold sharp interval between night and morning—the distant streak of light widening and spreading, and turning from grey to white, and from white to yellow, and from yellow to burnng red. . . . The coming to a town—people busy in the market; light carts and chaises round the tavern yard; tradesmen standing at their doors; men running horses up and down the street for sale; . . . the night coach changing horses—the passengers cheerless, cold, ugly, and discontented, with three month's growth of hair in one night—the coachman fresh as from a bandbox and exquisitely beautiful by contrast;—so much bustle, so many things in motion, such a variety of incidents—when was there a journey with so many delights as that journey in the waggon!

From Wolverhampton to Tong is only $9\frac{1}{2}$ miles, but Dickens enlarged his canvas and pictured the journey as covering several of the towns he had visited on his earlier journey in this direction. Thus Shifnal, four miles beyond Tong, is described, also Shrewsbury; for Dickens makes the journey last three days. Some maps purporting to show the route of Little Nell, actually represent the journey as being to Shrewsbury and back to Tong, but of course that is a quite unreasonable supposition. However, if we become acquainted with these Shropshire towns, we will see how accurate were Dickens's descriptions.

At the end of the first day

They came to a large town, where the waggon stopped and where they spent a night. They passed a large church; and in the streets were a number of old houses, built of a kind of earth or plaster, crossed and re-crossed

in a great many directions with black beams, which gave them a remarkable and very ancient look. The doors, too, were arched and low, some with oaken portals and quaint benches, where the former inhabitants had sat on summer evenings. The windows were latticed in little diamond panes, that seemed to wink and blink upon the passengers as if they were dim of sight. They had long since got clear of the smoke and furnaces, except in one or two solitary instances, where a factory planted among fields withered the space about it, like a burning mountain. When they had passed through this town, they entered again upon the country, and began to draw near their place of destination.

"It was not so near, however but that they spent another night upon the road" we read, not of necessity, but because the schoolmaster wanted to arrive in trim order!; and on "a fine, clear, autumn morning" they arrived at their destination. "'See—here's the church' cried the delighted schoolmaster.'

They admired everything—the old grey porch, the mullioned windows, the venerable grave-stones dotting the green church-yard, the ancient tower, the very weather-cock; the brown thatched roofs of cottage, barn and homestead, peeping from among the trees; the stream that rippled by the distant watermill; the blue Welsh mountains far away. It was for such a spot the child had wearied in the dense, dark, miserable haunts of labour. . . . It was a very aged, ghostly place; the church had been built many hundreds of years ago, and had once had a convent or monastery attached; for arches in ruins, remains of oriel windows, and fragments of blackened walls, were yet standing; while other portions of the old building, which had crumbled away and fallen down, were mingled with the church-yard earth and over-grown with grass, as if they too claimed a burying-place and sought to mix their ashes with the dust of men. Hard by these gravestones of dead years, and forming a part of the ruin which some pains had been taken to render habitable in modern times, were two small dwellings with sunken windows and oaken doors, fast hastening to decay, empty and desolate.

In one of these houses the schoolmaster was to dwell, the other was to be for Nell and her grandfather; for Nell was to have charge of the church keys and to open and close the church for services and show it to visitors.

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The ruins at the western end of the church are all that now remain of the two dwellings above referred to. The old school and cottage were pulled down in about 1818. The “little inn yonder” to which the schoolmaster referred, before leaving Nell to wait for him in the church porch, is now a private house; it is opposite the church, and the old inn yard is plainly discernible.

The description of the interior of the church is so detailed, that it can hardly be mistaken for anything else in the neighbourhood.

Here was the broken pavement, worn so long ago by pious feet, that Time, stealing on the pilgrims’ steps, had trodden out their track, and left but crumbling stones. Here were the rotten beam, the sinking arch, the sapped and mouldering wall, the lowly trench of earth, the stately tomb on which no epitaph remained,—all,—marble, stone, iron, wood and dust, one common monument of ruin. The best work and the worst, the plainest and the richest, the stateliest and the least imposing—both of Heaven’s work and Man’s—all found one common level here, and told one common tale.

Some part of the edifice had been a baronial chapel, and here were effigies of warriors stretched upon their beds of stone with folded hands, cross-legged—those who had fought in the Holy Wars—girded with their swords, and cased in armour as they had lived. Some of these knights had their own weapons, helmets, coats of mail, hanging upon the walls hard by, and dangling from rusty hooks. Broken and dilapidated as they were, they yet retained their ancient form, and something of their ancient aspect. Thus violent deeds live after men upon the earth, and traces of war and bloodshed will survive in mournful shapes, long after those who worked the desolation are but atoms of earth themselves.

Visitors to the church are directed to the Vernon Chantry—founded by Sir Harry Vernon, who built the adjacent Tong Castle in 1815 as the “baronial chapel” above referred to.

They were all poor country people in the church, for the castle in which the old family had lived, was an empty ruin, and there were none but humble folks for seven miles around.

Tong Castle is referred to here: but it is far from being the “empty ruin” that Dickens describes—nor was it such at the time he visited the village.

CHAPTER NINE

THE DOTHEBOYS ROUTE TO YORKSHIRE AND THE NORTH

I

THE Dickens interest in Great North Road as far as Barnet has already been described in Chapter Seven, and we have now to consider the earlier holiday of 1838 that Dickens took with Phiz, into Yorkshire, before commencing to write *Nicholas Nickleby*.

The only records of this journey are contained in the preface to the book, and in a letter written to Mrs. Dickens from Greta Bridge on February 1st, 1838.

In this preface Dickens says:

I went down into Yorkshire before I began this book, in very severe winter time, which is pretty faithfully described therein.

And his object was to investigate the abuse of the Yorkshire schools.

I cannot call to mind, now, how I came to hear about Yorkshire schools when I was a not very robust child, sitting in bye-places near Rochester Castle, with a head full of Partridge, Strap, Tom Pipes, and Sancho Panza; but I know that my first impressions of them were picked up at that time, and that they were somehow or other connected with a suppurated abscess that some boy had come home with, in consequence of his Yorkshire guide, philosopher, and friend, having ripped it open with an inky pen-knife. The impression made upon me, however made, never left me. I was always curious about Yorkshire schools—fell, long afterwards and at sundry times, into the way of hearing more about them—at last, having an audience, resolved to write about them.

The bitterly cold weather Dickens experienced is thus described in *Nicholas Nickleby*:

The weather was intensely and bitterly cold; a great deal of snow fell from time to time; and the wind was intolerably keen. Mr. Squeers got down at almost every stage—to stretch his legs as he said—and as he always came back from such excursions with a very red nose, and composed himself to sleep directly, there is reason to suppose that he derived great benefit from the process.

This was reflected in a Christmas story, *The Holly Tree Inn*, when the jilted writer of the story says:

I had resolved to make a visit to a certain spot (which I need not name) on the farther borders of Yorkshire. It was endeared to me by my having first seen Angela at a farmhouse in that place, and my melancholy was gratified by the idea of taking a wintery leave of it before my expatriation.

His destination was the same as ours, Greta Bridge, and the coach ride so graphically described in the story doubtless expressed Dickens's own experiences.

The lonely day wore on, and I dozed it out, as a lonely traveller does. I was warm and valiant after eating and drinking,—particularly after dinner; cold and depressed at all other times. . . . While we changed horses the guard and coachman went stumping up and down the road, printing off their shoes in the snow, and poured so much liquid consolation into themselves without being any the worse for it, that I began to confound them, as it darkened again, with two great white casks standing on end. . . . All night long we went on in this manner. Thus we came round the clock, upon the Great North Road, to the performance of *Auld Lang Syne* by day again. And it snowed and snowed, and still it snowed, and never left off snowing.

II

The journey of Nicholas Nickleby into Yorkshire started from the Saracen's Head at Snow Hill, close to where now stands a modern building bearing that name and recording that fact in its history by means of a plaque on either side of the doorway, which is surmounted by a bust of Dickens.

The Coach, we read, was soon "rattling over the stones of Smithfield" and in due course got to Islington, where at the Peacock it stopped, thus enabling Nicholas to find a safer

seat for the little boys in his charge who had been in danger of being jerked off the coach owing to the jolting.

Off she goes! And off she did go,—if coaches be feminine—amidst a loud flourish from the guard's horn, and the calm approval of all the judges of coaches and coach-horses congregated at the Peacock, but more especially of the helpers, who stood, with the cloths over their arms, watching the coach till it disappeared, and then lounged admiringly stablewards, bestowing various gruff encomiums on the beauty of the turn-out.

Until Eaton Socon was reached, 55 miles from London, there is no mention of the towns of Barnet, Hatfield, Stevenage, and Biggleswade, or any other place on the way.

Dickens must have been very familiar with Hatfield, although we do not know the reason for his visits there; the only record is in the Diary to which we have already referred, where on Monday, October 29th, 1838, we find the entry: "Hatfield—expenses on Saturday £1 12s." From this it would appear that Phiz was also his companion on this occasion.

Hatfield figures prominently in one portion of *Oliver Twist*.

Bill Sikes "shaped his course for Hatfield" in his flight from London after the murder of Nancy, and "turned down the hill by the church of the quiet village and plodding along the little street, crept into a small public-house, whose scanty light had guided them to the spot. There was a fire in the tap-room, and some country-labourers were drinking before it. They made room for the stranger, but he sat down in the furthest corner, and ate and drank alone."

The present main road leaves the old part of the little town, on the right, and the above description shows that Dickens knew Hatfield well.

The quaint old Eight Bells, is said to have been the "small public house" where the "antic fellow, half pedlar, half mountebank" sold the "stooft" that was the

"Infallible and invaluable composition for removing . . . wine-stains, fruit-stains, beer-stains, water-stains, paint-stains, pitch-stains, mud-stains, blood-stains! . . .

Here is a stain upon the hat of a gentleman in company, that I'll take clean out, before he can order me a pint of ale."

"Hah!" cried Sikes starting up. "Give that back."

"I'll take it clean out, sir," replied the man, winking to the company, "before you can come across the room to get it. Gentlemen all, observe the dark stain upon this gentleman's hat, no wider than a shilling, but thicker than a half-crown. Whether it is a wine-stain, fruit-stain, beer-stain, water-stain, paint-stain, pitch-stain, mud-stain, or blood-stain—"

The man got no further, for Sikes with a hideous imprecation overthrew the table, and tearing the hat from him, burst out of the house.

Finding he was not followed, Sikes

Turned back up the town, and getting out of the glare of the lamps of a stage-coach that was standing in the street, was walking past, when he recognised the mail from London, and saw that it was standing at the little post-office.

The "little post office" since rebuilt, is next door to the Salisbury Arms.

Here he heard talk of the murder "down Spitalfields way," and, after "standing in the street apparently unmoved by what he had just heard. . . . At length he went back again, and took the road which leads from Hatfield to St. Albans."

The account of the fire, which Sikes assisted so valiantly in putting out, is said to have been inspired by the actual fire that did an immense amount of damage to Hatfield House at about that time.

The inimitable Mrs. Lirriper spent her honeymoon at Hatfield, staying at the Salisbury Arms above mentioned which doubtless Dickens knew well.

My poor Lirriper being behindhand with the world and being buried at Hatfield church in Hertfordshire, not that it was his native place but that he had a liking for the Salisbury Arms where we went upon our wedding-day and passed as happy a fortnight as ever happy was. . . .

After Mrs. Lirriper had paid off all her late husband's creditors she then tells us:

I then put a sandwich and a drop of sherry in a little basket and went down to Hatfield churchyard outside the coach and kissed my hand and laid it with a kind of proud and swelling love on my husband's grave, though bless you it had taken me so long to clear his name that my wedding-

ring was worn quite fine and smooth when I laid it on the green waving grass.

Hatfield churchyard had an attraction for the Lirripers as on another occasion Mrs. Lirriper tells us:

My poor Lirriper's own youngest brother and mightn't have meant not paying his bill at the Salisbury Arms when his affection took him down to stay a fortnight at Hatfield churchyard and might have meant to keep sober but for bad company.

III

A short distance from Welwyn we reach Knebworth Park, the handsome residence of Lord Lytton, the birthplace of the scheme to assist the necessitous in Literature and Art that was so warmly advocated by Dickens and supported by Lytton. Forster affords us the following information:

"In the year of the establishment of *Household Words* Dickens resumed what I have called his splendid strolling on behalf of a scheme for the advantage of men of letters, to which a great brother-author had given the sanction of his genius and name. In November, 1850, in the hall of Lord Lytton's old family seat in Knebworth Park, there were three private performances by the original actors in Ben Jonson's 'Every Man in His Humour,' of which all the circumstances and surroundings were very brilliant; some of the gentlemen of the county played both in comedy and farces; our generous host was profuse of all noble encouragement: and amid the general pleasure and excitement hopes rose high. Recent experience had shown what the public interest in this kind of amusement might place within reach of its providers; and there came to be discussed the possibility of making permanent such help as had been afforded to fellow-writers, by means of an endowment that should not be mere charity, but should combine something of both pension-list and college lectureship, without the drawbacks of either. It was not enough considered that schemes for self-help, to be successful, require from those they are meant to benefit, not only a general assent to their desirability, but zealous co-operation. Too readily assuming what should have had more thorough investigation, the enterprise was set on foot, and the 'Guild of Literature and Art' originated at Knebworth."

Lord Lytton wrote a play—"Not so Bad as we Seem"—and Dickens threw himself whole heartedly into the double task of acting and stage management.

On November 3rd, 1850, we find Dickens writing to Lytton:

I am full of confidence and resolve to do the utmost that is in me—and I well know they all will—to make the nights at Knebworth, *triumphant*. Once in a thing like this—once in everything, to my way of thinking—it must be carried out like a mighty enterprise, heart and soul. Pray regard me as wholly at the disposal of the theatricals until they shall be gloriously achieved.

The result, as Forster says, was brilliant.

On his return, Dickens wrote to Mrs. Watson, at whose house at Rockingham he had recently been playing in amateur theatricals. (See page 291.)

"Everything has gone off in a whirl of triumph and fired the whole length and breadth of the county of Hertfordshire."

The scheme progressed, and performances were given in various towns headed by the famous one at Devonshire House, at which Queen Victoria and the Prince Consort were present. A piece of land at Stevenage near by was given by Lord Lytton, and in 1865, the houses were ready, and on July 29th, the members of the Guild went to Stevenage to inspect these houses, and afterwards accepted the hospitality of Lytton at Knebworth, when Dickens proposed the health of the host in the course of which he explained:

The Ladies and Gentlemen whom we shall invite to occupy the houses we have built, will never be placed under any social disadvantage. They will be invited to occupy them as artists and receiving them as a mark of the high respect in which they are held by their fellow workers.

Unfortunately the scheme was a failure because, in spite of the promoter's most sanguine hopes, the support, indispensable to its success, was not given to it by the very persons it was founded to support. The houses were empty for nearly twenty years, and then converted into ordinary residences.

The idea underlying the establishment of the Guild was part of Dickens's great aversion to any form of patronage of Literature which was with him the whole of his life.

To quote Forster: "It survived the failure of the Guild whereby it was hoped to establish a system of self-help, under which men engaged in literary pursuits might be as proud to receive as to give. Though there was no project

of his life into which he flung himself with greater eagerness than the Guild, it was not taken up by the class it was meant to benefit, and every renewed exertion more largely added to the failure. A passage from a letter to Bulwer Lytton at its outset will be some measure of the height from which the writer fell, when all hope for what he had so set his heart upon ceased. 'I do devoutly believe that this plan, carried by the support which I trust will be given to it, will change the status of the literary man in England, and make a revolution in his position which no government, no power on earth but his own, could ever effect. I have implicit confidence in the scheme—so splendidly begun—if we carry it out with a steadfast energy. I have a strong conviction that we hold in our hands the peace and honour of men of letters for centuries to come, and that you are destined to be their best and most enduring benefactor. . . . Oh, what a procession of new years may walk out of all his for the class we belong to, after we are dust.'"

The houses founded as a result of the work of the Guild are still standing, and we pass them on the right on entering Stevenage, nearly opposite a public-house bearing the very appropriate title of *Our Mutual Friend*.

Dickens was a frequent visitor to Lytton at Knebworth, and in 1861 spent a week there with his daughter and Miss Hogarth, conferring with Lytton about his "Strange Story" that was to appear in *All the Year Round*. On this occasion Forster informs us that he "there met Mr. Arthur Helps, with whom and Lord Orford he visited the so-called "Hermit" near Stevenage, whom he described as Mr. Mopes in *Tom Tiddler's Ground*. With his great brother-artist he thoroughly enjoyed himself, as he invariably did; and reported *him* as "in better health and spirits than I have seen him in, in all these years—a little weird occasionally regarding magic and spirits, but always fair and frank under opposition. He was brilliantly talkative, anecdotal, and droll; looked young and well; laughed heartily; and enjoyed with great zest some games we played. In his artist-character and talk he was full of interest and matter, saying the subtlest and finest things—but that he never fails in. I enjoyed myself immensely, as we all did."

"How far may it be to this said Tom Tiddler's Ground?" asked the Traveller.

"Put it at five mile" returned the Landlord.

Dickens does not mention the place by name, but this is surely a sufficient clue to the locality.

Among the pleasant dales and trout-streams of a green English county. No matter what county. Enough that you may hunt there, shoot there, fish there, traverse long grass-grown Roman roads there, open ancient barrows there, see many a square mile of richly cultivated land there, and hold Arcadian talk with a bold peasantry, their country's pride, who will tell you (if you want to know) how pastoral housekeeping is done on nine shillings a week. . . .

Mr. Traveller sat at his breakfast in the little sanded parlour of the Peal of Bells village alehouse, with the dew and dust of an early walk upon his shoes—an early walk by road and meadow and coppice, that had sprinkled him bountifully with little blades of grass, and scraps of new hay, and with leaves both young and old, and with other such fragrant tokens of the freshness and wealth of summer.

Kitton says that the White Hart at Stevenage is the original of the Peal of Bells, and that Dickens and his party stopped there on their walk from Knebworth, to enquire the best way to the house of the "Hertfordshire Hermit."

The following is a picture of the street at Stevenage; taken from the same story :

The village street was like most other village streets; wide for its height, silent for its size, and drowsy in the dullest degree. The quietest little dwellings with the largest of window-shutters (to shut up Nothing as carefully as if it were the Mint, or the Bank of England) had called in the Doctor's house so suddenly, that his brass door-plate and three stories stood among them as conspicuous and different as the Doctor himself in his broad-cloth, among the smock-frocks of his patients. The village residences seemed to have gone to law with a similar absence of consideration, for a score of weak little lath-and-plaster cabins clung in confusion about the Attorney's red-brick house, which, with glaring door-steps and a most terrific scraper, seemed to serve all manner of ejectments upon them. They were as various as labourers—high shouldered, wry-necked, one-eyed, goggle-

eyed, squinting, bow-legged, knocked-knee'd, rheumatic, crazy. Some of the small tradesmen's houses, such as the crockery-shop and the harness-makers, had a Cyclops window in the middle of the gable, within an inch or two of its apex, suggesting that some forlorn rural Prentice must wriggle himself into that apartment horizontally, when he retired to rest, after the manner of the worm. So bountiful in its abundance was the surrounding country, and so lean and scant the village, that one might have thought the village had sown and planted everything it once possessed, to convert the same into crops. This would account for the bareness of the little shops, the bareness of the few boards, and trestles designed for market purposes in a corner of the street, the bareness of the obsolete Inn and Inn Yard, with the ominous inscription "Excise Office" not yet faded out from the gateway, as indicating the very last thing that poverty could get rid of. . . .

Mr. Traveller having finished his breakfast and paid his moderate score, walked out to the threshold of the Peal of Bells, and, thence directed by the pointing finger of his host, betook himself towards the ruined hermitage of Mr. Mopes the hermit.

The real Mr. Mopes was James Lucas who died in 1874. His house at Redcoats Green—Elmwood House—continued to remain in its dilapidated state until 1893, when it was pulled down.

It was a nook in a rustic by-road, which the genius of Mopes had laid waste as completely as if he had been born an Emperor and a Conqueror. Its centre object was a dwelling-house, sufficiently substantial, all the window-glass of which had been long ago abolished by the surprising genius of Mopes, and all the windows of which were barred across with rough-split logs of trees nailed over them on the outside. A rickyard, hip-high in vegetable rankness and ruin, contained out-buildings, from which the thatch had lightly fluttered away, on all the winds of all the seasons of the year, and from which the planks and beams had heavily dropped and rotted. The frosts and damps of winter, and the heats of summer, had warped what wreck remained, so that not a post or a board retained the position it was meant to hold, but everything was twisted from its purpose, like its owner, and degraded and debased. In this homestead of the slattern, behind the ruined hedge,

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and sinking away among the ruined grass and the nettles, were the last perishing fragments of certain ricks; which had gradually mildewed and collapsed, until they looked like mounds of rotten honeycomb or dirty sponge.

v

All this while we have not forgotten the passengers on the coach, making for Dotheboys Hall: but they have not yet reached Eaton Socon, 23 miles away and Nicholas is still in conversation with the "good tempered man" and Squeers is at his regular leg stretching game.

So the day wore on. At Eton Slocomb there was a good coach dinner, of which the box, the four front outsides, the one inside, Nicholas, the good-tempered man, and Mr. Squeers, partook; while the five little boys were put to thaw by the fire, and regaled with sandwiches.

The correct name of this town is Eaton Socon: Dickens certainly gave it a more humorous title!

The inn that offered the "good coach dinner" for the adults and the thawing fire and sandwiches for the little boys was probably the Cock where the coaches stopped. It is no longer an inn.

A stage or two further on, the lamps were lighted, and a great to-do occasioned by the taking up, at a roadside inn, of a very fastidious lady with an infinite variety of cloaks and small parcels, who loudly lamented, for the behoof of the outsides, the non-arrival of her own carriage which was to have taken her on, and make the guard solemnly promise to stop every green chariot he saw coming; which, as it was a dark night and he was sitting with his face the other way, that officer undertook, with many fervent asseverations, to do.

This probably happened somewhere in the neighbourhood of Norman Cross or at Kate's Cabin Inn three miles further on. It had its counterpart in an actual happening to Dickens as he described in the letter to his wife :

We had a very droll male companion until seven o'clock in the evening, and a most delicious lady's-maid for twenty miles, who implored us to keep a sharp look-out at the coach windows, as she expected the carriage was coming to meet her and she was afraid of missing it. We had many delightful vauntings of the same kind; but in

the end it is scarcely necessary to say that the coach did not come, but a very dirty girl did.

From this inn it is 10 miles to Stamford. "The night and the snow came on together, and dismal enough they were. There was no sound to be heard but the howling of the wind; for the noise of the wheels, and the tread of the horses' feet were rendered inaudible by the thick coating of snow which covered the ground, and was fast increasing every moment. The streets of Stamford were deserted as they passed through the town; and its old churches rose, frowning and dark, from the whitened ground."

Twenty miles further on, two of the front outside passengers wisely availing themselves of their arrival at one of the best inns in England, turned in, for the night, at the George at Grantham.

It was of the George Inn, at Grantham, that Dickens wrote to his wife from Gre a Bridge on February 1st, 1838.

We reached Grantham between nine and ten on Thursday night, and found everything prepared for our reception in the very best inn I have ever put up at. It is odd enough that an old lady, who had been outside all day and came in towards dinner-time, turned out to be the mistress of a Yorkshire school returning from the holiday stay in London. She was a very queer old lady, and showed us a long letter she was carrying to one of the boys from his father, containing a severe lecture (enforced and aided by many texts of Scripture) on his refusing to eat boiled meat. She was very communicative, drank a great deal of brandy-and-water, and towards evening became insensible, in which state we left her.

It was probably as far as Grantham that Inspector Bucket and Esther got in their chase of Lady Dedlock from London and through St. Albans as described so graphically in Chapter LVII of *Bleak House*.

To avoid suspicion Lady Dedlock had changed dresses with the wife of one of the brickmakers at St. Albans and had doubled back to London, Jenny the decoy walking for a few miles in the northerly direction. This deceived Bucket, who thought Lady Dedlock was making for Chesney Wold and all that day Esther and he went travelling over the worst roads imaginable, in a snow-storm such as Dickens himself had experienced. In the evening they rested at an inn for

half an hour and here Esther fainted and was tenderly looked after by the hostess.

The George at Grantham may have been in Dickens's mind when he wrote:

There was a spacious inn here, solitary, but a comfortable substantial building, and as we drove in under a large gateway before I knew it, where a landlady and her pretty daughters came to the carriage-door, entreating me to alight and refresh myself while the horses were making ready, I thought it would be uncharitable to refuse. They took me upstairs to a warm room, and left me there.

It was at the corner of the house, I remember, looking two ways. On one side, to a stable-yard open to a by-road where the ostlers were unharnessing the splashed and tired horses from the muddy carriage; and beyond that, to the by-road itself, across which the sign was heavily swinging; on the other side, to a wood of dark pine-trees. Their branches were encumbered with snow, and it silently dropped off in wet heaps while I stood at the window.

They went one stage beyond this, and when they stopped to change horses, Bucket changed his mind, and ordered the "four horses for the next stage *up*," much to Esther's surprise. "But I'll follow the other. Look alive here with them horses. Send a man for'ard in the saddle to the next stage, and let him send another for'ard again, and order four on, up, right through. My darling, don't you be afraid!"

We have given a fuller account of Lady Dedlock's flight in the portion of Chapter Eight dealing with St. Albans and its connection with *Bleak House*.

Dickens and Phiz left Grantham the following morning, completing their journey that day, for he wrote to his wife, "Yesterday we were up again shortly after seven a.m., came on upon our journey by the Glasgow mail, which charged us the remarkable low sum of six pounds fare for two places inside."

Nicholas Nickleby, however, travelled through the night, and was one of those who "wrapped themselves more closely in their coats and cloaks, and leaving the night and warmth of the town behind them, pillow'd themselves against the luggage and prepared, with many half-suppressed moans, again to encounter the piercing blast which swept across the open country."

"They were little more than a stage out of Grantham or about half way between it and Newark" when the coach

met with an accident, and the passengers, badly shaken, but not otherwise injured, had to take refuge in a wayside inn, while the guard went back to Grantham on horseback to get another coach.

This probably happened at Long Bennington where the inn, probably the Wheatsheaf, was described as,

A lonely place with no very great accommodation in the way of apartments—that portion of its resources being all comprised in one public room with a sanded floor, and a chair or two. However, a large faggot and a plentiful supply of coals being heaped upon the fire, the appearance of things was not long in 'nending.

Here the party waited for the return of the guard with the coach and beguiled the time with the stories of the Five Sisters of York and the Baron Grogzwig. "The journey was then resumed. Nicholas fell asleep towards morning."

Of the road by Retford and Doncaster, we are told nothing—for it was night time. Through Wetherby and Boroughbridge they passed during the day: but no mention of these or any other places appear in the narrative.

Boroughbridge however, appears later on when Nicholas leaves Dotheboys Hall, after having thrashed the schoolmaster.

Nicholas . . . made his way before night to Boroughbridge. Passing through that town in search of some cheap resting place, he stumbled upon an empty barn, within a couple of hundred yards of the road side: in a warm corner of which he stretched his weary limbs and soon fell asleep.

Here he met Smike, "and so they passed out of the old barn together."

Doncaster was visited by Dickens in later years during his "Lazy Tour" with Wilkie Collins, and reference is made to it in the chapter devoted to that pilgrimage (page 219).

Nicholas, the schoolmaster and the young pupils, arrived as near to Dotheboys Hall as the London Mail would take them, at the end of a long and uncomfortable day, and we read that at about six o'clock that night "he and Mr. Squeers, and the little boys, and their united luggage were all put down together at the George and New Inn, Greta Bridge."

Now the identity of this Inn has puzzled many an inquirer, for since the railway came and left the little village of Greta Bridge stranded, the need for inns has greatly lessened, and several of the old inns have almost been lost in obscurity; one that was known to have existed on the left hand side of the road entering the village from London, just before reaching the Bridge, used to be called the George, and it has generally been assumed that this was the inn where the coach stopped. There was another inn at the time, about half a mile away known as the New Inn, and it was Kitton, we believe, who first put forward the very reasonable explanation that Dickens had joined the two names together when referring to the Inn in *Nicholas Nickleby*. At a later date Mr. T. P. Cooper who has long identified himself with Dickensian research in Yorkshire, endorsed this opinion in his interesting volume "With Dickens in Yorkshire," to which the writer wishes to record a debt of gratitude; but in April 1924, Mr. Cooper contributed an article to "The Dickensian" in which he was able to show conclusively from information that had since come into his possession that the George and New Inn was one inn in fact, and exists to-day in Thorpe Grange, now a pretty house about half a mile before reaching the village. The extensive stabling at the rear stands as proof of its former usage.

We are pleased Mr. Cooper has at length solved this question, for the lonely situation of Thorpe Grange fits in much better with Dickens's own description in the letter to his wife, quoted below, than does the present house by the Bridge, the old George Inn.

As we came north the snow grew deeper. About eight o'clock it began to fall heavily, and, as we crossed the wild heaths hereabout, there was no vestige of a track. The mail kept on well, however, and at eleven we reached a bare place with a house, standing alone in the midst of a dreary moor, which the guard informed us was Greta Bridge. I was in a perfect agony of apprehension, for it was fearfully cold, and there was no outward signs of anybody being up in the house. But to our great joy we discovered a comfortable room, with drawn curtains and a most blazing fire. In half an hour they gave us a smoking supper and a bottle of mulled port (in which we drank your health) and then we retired to a couple of capital bedrooms, in each of which there were a rousing fire halfway up the chimney. We have had for breakfast, toast, cakes, a Yorkshire pie, a piece of beef about the size and much



DO THE BOY'S HALL, BOWES

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THE GEORGE AND NEW INN, Greta Bridge

the shape of my portmanteau, tea, coffee, ham and eggs; and are now going to look about us.

The George and New Inn, at Greta Bridge is also pointed out as the probable original of the Holly Tree Inn described as being on "the farther borders of Yorkshire . . . on a Yorkshire moor . . ." A similar rambling house, apparently, judging by Dickens's description of the large rooms, and long corridor; his own bedroom being "some quarter of a mile away" from the sitting-room. Its being on the road to Gretna Green fits in well with the charming story told by Boots, of Mr. and Mrs Harry Walmers Junior.

In Dickens's day the inn was kept by George Martin, who had formerly been landlord of the minor inn the Merritt Arms, the only inn now in Greta Bridge.

Dickens playfully turned the name of Martin into Swallow, when Mrs. Squeers, arranging to follow the fugitive Simeon says to Mr. Squeers: "You take the chaise and go one road: and I borrow Swallow's chaise and go the other."

"Mr. Squeers being safely landed" at the George, and having performed "the leg stretching process at the bar" "a rusty pony chaise and a cart" took the party to Dotheboys Hall, "about three miles from here . . . but you needn't call it a Hall down here" volunteered Squeers.

Dotheboys Hall was "a long cold looking house, one story high, with a few straggling outbuildings behind, and a barn and stable adjoining."

In the advertisement as drawn up by Mr. Squeers this is how it is described:

"Education—At Mr. Wackford Squeers's Academy, Dotheboys Hall, at the delightful village of Dotheboys, near Greta Bridge in Yorkshire. Youth are boarded, clothed, booked furnished with pocket-money, provided with all necessaries, instructed in all languages, living and dead, mathematics, orthography, geometry, astronomy, trigonometry, the use of the globes, algebra, single stick (if required), writing, arithmetic, fortification, and every other branch of classical literature. Terms twenty guineas per annum. No extras, no vacations, and diet unparalleled. Mr. Squeers is in town, and attends daily, from one till four, at the Saracen's Head, Snow Hill. N.B. An able assistant wanted. Annual salary £5. A Master of Arts would be preferred."

"The delightful village of Dotheboys" has its prototype in Bowes, and the "Hall" is to be seen at the far end of the

village on the left, going towards Gretna Green. It is now known as The Villa and has undergone much alteration in recent years, the old schoolroom having been demolished; the yard with the pump is still to be seen at the rear.

In the days Dickens visited the district it was kept by one William Shaw, whose "professional card" was worded as follows:

At Bowes Academy near Greta Bridge, Yorkshire; youth are carefully instructed in the English, Latin, and Greek languages, Writing, Common and Decimal Arithmetic, Book-Keeping, Mensuration, Surveying, Geometry, Geography, and Navigation, with the most useful branches of the Mathematics, and are provided with Board, Clothes, and every necessary at twenty Guineas per annum each. No vacations except by the Parents' desire. N.B. The French language Two Guineas per annum extra. Mr. Shaw attends at the George and Blue Boar, High Holborn, the three first weeks in the months of January and July.

The Diary that Dickens kept very spasmodically in the early part of 1838 records the following significant information under date of February 3rd.

Shaw the schoolmaster we saw today is the man in whose school several boys went blind some time since, from gross neglect. The case was tried and the verdict went against him. It must have been between 1823 and 1826. Look this out in the newspapers.

As a matter of fact the trial was on October 30th, 1823 and £300 damages were awarded against Shaw: and on the following day there was another action against Shaw, withdrawn after the first witness, on the payment of a similar amount of damages.

The full story of how Dickens came to meet this Yorkshire schoolmaster is told by him in the preface to *Nicholas Nickleby*:

I went down into Yorkshire before I began this book, in very severe winter-time which is pretty faithfully described herein. As I wanted to see a schoolmaster or two, and was forewarned that those gentlemen might, in their modesty, be shy of receiving a visit from the author of *The Pickwick Papers*, I consulted with a professional friend who had a Yorkshire connection, and with whom I concerted a pious fraud.

This was Charles Smithson of Malton, Yorkshire, partner of Dickens's old schoolfellow Thomas Mitton, who practised as a solicitor at 23 Southampton Buildings, Chancery Lane, London. In later years Dickens visited Smithson in his home at Malton (see page 211).

He gave me some letters of introduction, in the name, I think, of my travelling companion; they bore reference to a supposititious little boy who had been left with a widowed mother who didn't know what to do with him; the poor lady had thought, as a means of thawing the tardy compassion of her relations in his behalf, of sending him to a Yorkshire school; I was the poor lady's friend, travelling that way; and if the recipient of the letter could inform me of a school in his neighbourhood, the writer would be very much obliged.

I went to several places in that part of the country where I understood the schools to be most plentifully sprinkled, and had no occasion to deliver a letter until I came to a certain town which shall be nameless. The person to whom it was addressed, was not at home; but he came down at night, through the snow, to the inn where I was staying. It was after dinner; and he needed little persuasion to sit down by the fire in a warm corner, and take his share of the wine that was on the table.

I am afraid he is dead now. I recollect he was a jovial, ruddy, broad faced man; that we got acquainted directly; and that we talked on all kinds of subjects, except the school, which he showed a great anxiety to avoid. Was there any large school near? I asked him, in reference to the letter. "Oh yes," he said; "there was a pratty big 'un." "Was it a good one?" I asked. "Ey!" he said, "it was as good as anothier; that was a' a matter of opinion;" and fell to looking at the fire, staring round the room, and whistling a little. On my reverting to some other topic that we had been discussing, he recovered immediately; but, though I tried him again and again, I never approached the question of the school, even if he were in the middle of a laugh, without observing that his countenance fell, and that he became uncomfortable.

At last, when we had passed a couple of hours or so very agreeably, he suddenly took up his hat and leaning over the table, and looking me full in the face, said in a low voice.

"Weel, Misther, we've been vary pleasant toogather, and ar'll spak my moind tiv'ee. Dinnot let the weedur send

her lattle boy to yon o' our schoolmeasters, while there's a house to hould 'im a' Lunnun, or a gotther to lie asleep in."

Kitton in "The Dickens Country" says that this person, the obvious original of John Browdie—was John S—of Broadiswood, a farmer: the name Browdie being taken from Broadiswood. But Mr. T. P. Cooper in his "With Dickens in Yorkshire," thinks, and with good reason, that Mr. Smithson would have been more likely to have given Dickens a letter of introduction to his own agent in Barnard Castle. This was Richard Barnes, and Mr. Cooper's theory is upheld by reference to a letter Dickens wrote to Mrs. S. C. Hall on December 29th, 1838, in which he says:

I went down in an assumed name, taking a plausible letter to an old Yorkshire attorney in town, telling him how a friend had been left a widow and wanted to place her boys at a Yorkshire school, in hopes of thawing the frozen compassion of her relations. The man of business gave me an introduction to one or two schools, but at night he came down to the inn where I was stopping, and after much hesitation and confusion—he was a large-headed, flat-nosed, red-faced, old fellow—said with a degree of feeling one would not have given him credit for, that the matters had been upon his mind all day—that they were sad places for mothers to send their orphan boys to—that he hoped I would not give him up as my adviser—but that she had better do anything with them—let them hold horses, run errands—fling them in any way upon the mercy of the World—rather than trust them there. This was an attorney, a well-fed man of business, and a rough Yorkshireman.

Not far from the Academy that was kept by Shaw, is the village church, and in the church yard Shaw and his son lie buried. The churchyard also contains a stone to the memory of George Ashton Taylor, aged 19 "who died suddenly at Mr. William Shaw's Academy 1822."

This was the grave visited by Dickens, as he tells us in the letter above mentioned, of which this is a further extract:

The country for miles round was covered, when I was there, with deep snow. There is an old church near the school, and the first grave-stone I stumbled on that dreary winter afternoon was placed above the grave of a boy, eighteen long years old, who had died—suddenly the

inscription said; I suppose his heart broke—the camel falls down “suddenly” when they heap the last load upon his back—died at that wretched place. I think his ghost put Smike into my head, upon the spot.

The strength of this mute appeal to Dickens's sense of justice was very great, for the letter states further:

Depend upon it that the rascalities of those Yorkshire schoolmasters cannot easily be exaggerated, and that I have kept down the strong truth and thrown as much comicality over it as I could, rather than disgust and weary the reader with its fouler aspects. The identical scoundrel you speak of I saw—curiously enough. His name is Shaw; the action was tried (I believe) eight or ten years since, and if I am not much mistaken another action was brought against him by the parents of a miserable child, a cancer in whose head he opened with an ink penknife, and so caused his death.

The interview with the prototype of John Browdie already referred to, took place at the King's Head Inn, Market Place, Barnard Castle, to which house Newman Noggs had recommended Nicholas in a letter which he handed him in parting at the Saracen's Head.

If you should go near Barnard Castle, there is good ale at the King's Head. Say you know me, and I am sure they will not charge you for it. You may say Mr. Noggs there, for I was a gentleman then. I was indeed.

The end of the letter from Dickens to his wife from Greta Bridge is as follows:

We start in a post-chaise for Barnard Castle, which is only four miles off, and there I deliver the letter given me by Mitton's friend. All the schools are round about that place, and a dozen old abbeys besides, which we shall visit by some means or other to-morrow. We shall reach York on Saturday I hope, and (God willing) I trust I shall be at home on Wednesday morning.

The King's Head at Barnard Castle has more the appearance of a private house than an inn, and although it has been extended, the older portion does not differ very much from what it was when Dickens stayed there.

Thomas Humphrey, a clock maker, had premises almost opposite to the King's Head, and it is said that Dickens took from him the idea of the title for his periodical started in 1840,

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called *Master Humphrey's Clock*. In the doorway of this shop used to stand a quaint tall clock, that was later depicted on the cover of the periodical.

In the last chapter but one of *Nicholas Nickleby*, the hero made a second journey to Yorkshire, and assisted at the breaking up of Dotheboys Hall. On this occasion he again travelled by coach, in the snow. It would seem as though Dickens could never think of the Great North Road without associating it with the bitter weather he himself experienced at the time he took the journey with Phiz. Stamford and Grantham are again mentioned by name, so is "the little ale house where he had heard the story of the bold Baron off Grogzwig" and "everything looked as if he had seen it but yesterday."

Nicholas "slept at the Inn at Greta Bridge on the night of his arrival" and in the morning he "walked to the Market town and enquired for John Browdie's house; John lived on the outskirts now he was a family man."

VII

From Barnard Castle Dickens made for York, as he wrote his wife was his intention. To reach this city, a post chaise had to be taken to Darlington, whence the regular coach could be picked up. This was on Saturday, February 3rd. In the previous week's issue of the "Durham Advertiser" an article had appeared making many erroneous statements as to the income derived by Boz from *The Pickwick Papers*. This incensed Dickens so much that there and then he wrote to the Editor of the paper, a flat contradiction of all the statements made in the article. The letter is dated "Darlington, Saturday Morning, February 3rd, 1838," and commences: "Waiting in this place for a York coach this morning, I chanced, in the course of a few minutes I stayed here, to take up your paper of January 26th, in which I saw a brief autobiography of myself by Dr. Mackenzie" etc.

According to Mr. Cooper, Dickens and Phiz put up at the Black Swan in Coney Street on the Saturday night and on the Sunday had lunch with Dr. Camidge the organist of York Minster, the service at which they attended in the morning. They had naturally observed the famous window called the Five Sisters of York, and heard its traditional history from the organist, which enabled Dickens to weave his own story, as told to the beleagured coach passengers at the inn midway between Grantham and Newark.

On Monday the journey homeward would be commenced, as at midday on Tuesday Dickens arrived in London, a day earlier than he had promised his wife. That evening, February 6th, 1838, the eve of his twenty-sixth birthday, he commenced *Nicholas Nickleby*, writing the day after in high glee to Forster: "I have begun! I wrote four slips last night, so you see the beginning is made. And what is more, I can go on."

In the summer of 1841, on the return journey from a holiday in Scotland, Dickens passed the night at York. Indeed it is probable that he often broke his journey here in travelling between London and Edinburgh, since his brother Alfred Lamert, who had taken a Yorkshire wife, lived at York. In a letter from Edinburgh on December 13th, 1847, we find him writing: "We have some idea of going to York on Sunday, passing that night at Alfred's and coming home on Monday."

Dickens' first reading in York was in September 1858, when he wrote from the Station Hotel, York, on Friday, September 10th, 1858, that flowers had fallen in his path wherever he had trod. To Forster he wrote of the reading given that evening: "I had a most magnificent audience and might have filled the place for a week. . . . I think the audience possessed of a better knowledge of character than any I have seen." And in the same letter he told of a wonderful tribute that had been paid to him :

I was brought very near to what I sometimes dream may be my Fame when a lady whose face I had never seen stopped me yesterday in the street and said to me, Mr. Dickens, will you let me touch the hand that has filled my house with many friends.

He was to have paid a return visit on the 25th October of the same year, but was indisposed, and the reading was cancelled.

Dickens's second reading in York was therefore not until the 28th February, 1867, and on Thursday March 11th, 1869, he gave his final reading, again in the Festival Concert Room, but hurried back to London by the night train to attend the funeral of his friend Emerson Tennent.

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The queerest place, with the strangest people in it, leading the oddest lives of dancing, newspaper reading and tables d'hôte.

Some of the audience he described in a characteristic letter to Miss Hogarth:

There was one gentleman at the Little Dombey yesterday who exhibited—or rather concealed—the profoundest grief. After crying a good deal without hiding it, he covered his face with both his hands and laid it down on the back of the seat before him, and really shook with emotion. He was not in mourning, but I supposed him to have lost some child in old time. . . . There was a remarkably good fellow too, of thirty or so, who found something so very ludicrous in Toots that he *could not* compose himself at all, but laughed until he sat wiping his eyes with his handkerchief; and whenever he felt Toots coming again, he began to laugh and wipe his eyes afresh; and when Toots came once more, he gave a kind of cry, as if it were too much for him. It was uncommonly droll, and made me laugh heartily.

Harrogate and Scarborough are both mentioned in *Dombey and Son* by Edith when at Leamington, as spas visited by her and Mrs. Skewton.

From Harrogate Dickens had to fulfil an engagement at Scarborough on the Monday; and Sunday trains did not then run from York.

The piety of York obliging us to leave that place for this (Scarborough) at six this morning, and there being no night train from Harrogate, we had to engage a special engine. We got to bed at one, and were up again before five; which, after yesterday's fatigues, leaves a me little worn out at this present.

And even then they had to walk three miles to the station, as the letter explains:

After the reading last night we walked over the moor to the railway, three miles, leaving our men to follow with the luggage in a light cart. They passed us just short of the railway, and John was making the night hideous and terrifying the sleeping country, by playing the horn in prodigiously horrible and unmusical blasts.

Of the journey from Harrogate to Scarborough he wrote in a later letter:

I seem to have been doing nothing all my life but riding in railway carriages and reading. The railway of the morning brought us through Castle Howard, and under the woods of Easthorpe, and then just below Malton Abbey, where I went to poor Smithson's funeral. It was a most lovely morning, and, tired as I was, I couldn't sleep for looking out of window.

The Smithson referred to was the one mentioned on page 205, who helped Dickens to make his investigations complete in regard to the Yorkshire schools. He lived at Easthorpe Hall, Malton, and was a frequent visitor at Dickens's house.

It was he who is also mentioned in the preface to *Barnaby Rudge*, as the Yorkshire friend who "discovered an older and more gifted raven at a village public house, which he prevailed upon the landlord to part with for a consideration" and sent up to Dickens as some consolation for the loss of a raven he had previously possessed, and so became the prototype of Grip.

Dickens and his wife visited Easthorpe Hall for a few weeks in July, 1843, while writing *Martin Chuzzlewit*. An account of the visit was given in a letter to Professor Felton:

What do you think of Mrs. Gamp. . . . Ah heaven! Such green woods as I was rambling along, down in Yorkshire when I was getting that done last July. For days and weeks we never saw the sky but through green boughs: and all day long I cantered over such soft moss and turf that the horse's feet scarcely made a sound upon it. We have some friends in that part of the country, who are the jolliest of the jolly, keeping a big old country house, with an ale cellar something larger than a reasonable church, and everything, like Goldsmith's bear dances "in a concatenation accordingly."

We performed some madnesses there in the way of forfeits, picnics, rustic games, inspection of ancient monasteries at midnight, when the moon was shining that would have gone to your heart, and as Mr. Weller says "come out on the other side."

In less than a year on April 5th, 1844, Dickens was again at Malton, to stand beside his friend's grave. He was only 39 years of age.

On this occasion, Dickens prolonged his journey and availed himself of an invitation of Lord Normanby, to whom he subsequently dedicated *Dombey and Son*, to visit him at Mulgrave Castle, near Whitby.

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Some years later, when Wilkie Collins was staying at Whitby, Dickens recalled this visit in a letter, in which he said:

In my time that curious railroad by the Whitby Moor was so much the more curious, that you were balanced against a counterweight of water, and that you did it like Blondin. But in those remote days the one inn of Whitby was up a back yard, and oyster shell grottoes were the only view from the best private room.

This inn was the White Horse and Griffin in Church Street: but the oyster shell grottoes have disappeared.

At Scarborough Dickens read twice in the Assembly Rooms (now a restaurant) on Monday September 13th, 1858, and wrote to Miss Hogarth from the Royal Hotel, the day before:

I have no accounts of this place as yet, nor have I received any letter here. But the post of this morning is not yet delivered, I believe. We have a charming room overlooking the sea. Leech is here (living within a few doors), with the partner of his bosom, and his young family. I write at ten in the morning, having been here two hours; and you will readily suppose that I have not seen him.

In another letter he announced: "Scarboro' is gay and pretty," and also that he "saw the Leech family . . . both in my own house (that is to say Hotel) and in theirs."

IX

Sunderland was the birthplace of Clarkson Stanfield, who painted some of the scenes for the Plays presented by Dickens and his company of famous men in Art and Literature; and it was at Sunderland that the company played at the old Lyceum Theatre, Lambton Street, on Saturday, August 28th, 1852. The theatre is gone now, the site being covered by a building in the occupation of the Salvation Army.

Of the conditions under which the plays were given, we glean an insight from a letter written by Dickens to Forster on August 29th, 1852:

Last night, in a hall, built like a theatre, with pit, boxes, and gallery, we had about twelve hundred—I dare say more. . . . I never saw such good fellows. Stanny is their fellow-townsman; was born here; and they applauded his scene as if it were himself. But what I suffered from

a dreadful anxiety that hung over me all the time, I can never describe. When we got here at noon, it appeared that the hall was a perfectly new one, and had only had the slates put upon the roof by torchlight over night. Farther, that the proprietors of some opposition rooms had declared the building to be unsafe, and that there was a panic in the town about it; people having had their money back and being undecided whether to come or not, and all kinds of such horrors. I didn't know what to do. The horrible responsibility of risking an accident of that awful nature seemed to rest only upon me; for I had only to say we wouldn't act, and there would be no chance of danger. I was afraid to take Sloman into council lest the panic should infect our men. I asked W. what *he* thought, and he consolingly observed that his digestion was so bad that death had no terrors for him. I went and looked at the place; at the rafters, walls, pillars and so forth; and fretted myself into a belief that they really were slight! To crown all, there was an arched iron roof without any brackets or pillars, on a new principle! The only comfort I had was in stumbling at length on the builder, and finding him a plain practical north-countryman with a foot rule in his pocket. I took him aside, and asked him should we, or could we, prop up any weak part of the place; especially the dressing-rooms, which were under our stage, the weight of which must be heavy on a new floor, and dripping wet walls. He told me there wasn't a stronger building in the world; and that, to allay the apprehension, they had opened it, on Thursday night, to thousands of the working people, and induced them to sing, and beat with their feet, and make every possible trial of the vibration. Accordingly there was nothing for it but to go on. I was in such dread however, lest a false alarm should spring up among the audience and occasion a rush, that I kept Catherine and Georgina out of the front. When the curtain went up and I saw the great sea of faces rolling up to the roof, I looked here and looked there, and thought I saw the gallery out of the perpendicular, and fancied the lights in the ceiling were not straight. Rounds of applause were perfect agony to me, I was so afraid of their effect upon the building. I was ready all night to rush on in case of an alarm—a false alarm was my main dread—and implore the people for God's sake to sit still. I had our great farce-bell rung to startle Sir Geoffrey instead of throwing down a piece of wood, which might have raised a sudden apprehension. I

had a palpitation of the heart, if any of our people stumbled up or down a stair. I am sure I never acted better, but the anxiety of my mind was so intense, and the relief at last so great, that I am half dead to-day, and have not yet been able to eat or drink anything or to stir out of my room. I shall never forget it. As to the short time we had for getting the theatre up; as to the upsetting, by a runaway pair of horses, of one of the vans at the Newcastle railway station with all the scenery in it, every atom of which was turned over; as to the fatigue of our carpenters, who have now been up four nights, and who were lying dead asleep in the entrances last night; I say nothing, after the other gigantic night-mare, except that Sloman's splendid knowledge of his business, and the good temper and cheerfulness of all the workmen are capital. I mean to give them a supper at Liverpool, and address them in a neat and appropriate speech. We dine at two to-day (it is now one) and go to Sheffield at four, arriving there at about ten. I had been as fresh as a daisy; walked from Nottingham to Derby, and from Newcastle here; but seem to have had my nerves crumpled up last night, and have an excruciating headache. That's all at present. I shall never be able to bear the smell of new deal and fresh mortar again as long as I live.

His next visit to Sunderland was on his reading tour, when he read *A Christmas Carol* at the Theatre Royal on September 23rd, 1858.

I read at Sunderland in a beautiful new theatre and (I thought to myself) quite wonderfully. Such an audience I never beheld for rapidity and enthusiasm. The room in which we acted (converted into a theatre afterwards) was burnt to the ground a year or two ago. We found the hotel, so bad in our time, really good.

I walked from Durham to Sunderland and from Sunderland to Newcastle.

On the previous visit, it will be remembered, he had walked from Newcastle to Sunderland (13 miles).

There is a brief mention of Durham in *Little Dorrit*, and Dickens visited the city on his way to Sunderland and Newcastle in 1858 and read in the Town Hall on September 22nd. As a matter of interest it will be seen from the letters quoted above that Dickens walked from Durham to Sunderland (4 miles) and from the latter place to Newcastle (13 miles).

Dickens was at Newcastle-on-Tyne in 1852 with his company of players for the benefit of the funds of the Guild of Literature and Art. The performance took place on August 27th, at the Assembly Rooms in Westgate Road, still used for social events.

Into the room at Newcastle (where Lord Carlisle was by-the-bye) they squeezed six hundred people, at twelve and sixpence, into a space reasonably capable of holding three hundred.

In 1858 three readings were given in the Town Hall, on September 24th and 25th. To Forster—whose birth-place was at Newcastle-on-Tyne, he wrote “I hope I told you how splendidly Newcastle came out.” On this occasion he stayed at the Station Hotel, and was joined by his two daughters who accompanied him to Berwick and on to Scotland for his readings there. (See page 217).

His next visit was in 1861 when he read at the Music Hall, Nelson Street, on November 21st, 22nd and 23rd. The warehouse below the Gaiety Picture Hall represents the Hall as it was in those days. An account of this visit is given in a letter to Forster:

At Newcastle, against the very heavy expenses, I made more than a hundred guineas profit. A finer audience there is not in England, and I suppose them to be a specially earnest people; for, while they can laugh till they shake the roof, they have a very unusual sympathy with what is pathetic or passionate. An extraordinary thing occurred on the second night. The room was tremendously crowded and my gas-apparatus fell down. There was a terrible wave among the people for an instant, and God knows what destruction of life a rush to the stairs would have caused. Fortunately a lady in the front of the stalls ran out towards me, exactly in a place where I knew that the whole hall could see her. So I addressed her, laughing, and half-asked and half-ordered her to sit down again; and, in a moment, it was all over. But the men in attendance had such a fearful sense of what might have happened (besides the real danger of Fire) that they positively shook the boards I stood on, with their trembling, when they came up to put things right. I am proud to record that the gas-man’s sentiment, as delivered afterwards, was:

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“The more you want of the master, the more you’ll find in him.” With which complimentary homage, and with the wind blowing so that I can hardly hear myself write, I conclude.

Another account is given in a letter to his daughter dated November 23rd:

A most tremendous hall here last night; something almost terrible in the cram. A fearful thing might have happened. Suddenly, when they were all very still over Smike, my gas batten came down, and it looked as if the room was falling. There were three great galleries crammed to the roof, and a high steep flight of stairs, and a panic must have destroyed numbers of the people. A lady in the front row of stalls screamed, and ran out wildly towards me, and for one instant there was a terrible wave in the crowd. I addressed that lady laughing (for I knew she was in sight of everybody there) and called out as if it happened every night “There’s nothing the matter, I assure you; don’t be alarmed; pray sit down,” and she sat down directly, and there was a thunder of applause. It took some few minutes to mend, and I looked on with my hands in my pockets, for I think if I had turned my back a moment there might still have been a move. My people were dreadfully alarmed, Boylett in particular, who I suppose had some notion that the whole place might have taken fire.

“But there stood the master,” he did me the honour to say afterwards, in addressing the rest, “as cool as ever I see him a-lounging at a railway station.”

On this occasion he stayed at the Queen’s Head Hotel, Pilgrim Street, now the Liberal Club.

His last visit was in March 1867, when he read at the Music Hall on the evenings of the 4th and 5th: he again spoke highly of his reception there:

The readings have made an immense effect in this place, and it is remarkable that although the people are individually rough, collectively they are an unusually tender and sympathetic audience; while their comic perception is quite up to the high London standard.

On this occasion he paid a visit to Tynemouth, his adventure there being recorded in a letter to Forster:

The atmosphere is so very heavy that yesterday we escaped to Tynemouth for a two hours’ sea walk. There was a high north wind blowing, and a magnificent sea

running. Large vessels were being towed in and out over the stormy bar, with prodigious waves breaking on it; and spanning the restless uproar of the waters, was a quiet rainbow of transcendent beauty. The scene was quite wonderful. We were in the full enjoyment of it when a heavy sea caught us, knocked us over, and in a moment drenched us and filled even our pockets. We had nothing for it but to shake ourselves together (like Doctor Marigold) and dry ourselves as well as we could by hard walking in the wind and sunshine. But we were wet through for all that, when we came back here to dinner after half-an-hour's railway drive. I am wonderfully well, and quite fresh and strong.

XI

As already mentioned, Dickens was at Berwick-on-Tweed in 1858, when on Sunday, September 26th, he and his two daughters left Newcastle for Edinburgh. He wrote at the time:

We are going to Berwick, and mean to sleep there and go on to Edinburgh on Monday morning arriving there before noon. If it be as fine to-morrow as it is to-day the girls will see the coast piece of railway between Berwick and Edinburgh to great advantage. I was anxious that they should, because that kind of pleasure is really almost the only one they are likely to have in their present trip.

On November 25th, 1861, Dickens gave a reading in the Assembly Rooms attached to the King's Arms Hotel, Berwick, where he was staying. The reading had been arranged for at the Corn Exchange, but on his arrival there, Dickens found the room quite impossible for his purposes. He wrote two letters on the subject both of which are worth recording. The first was to Forster:

As odd and out-of-the-way a place to be at, it appears to me as ever was seen! And such a ridiculous room designed for me to read in! An immense Corn Exchange, made of glass and iron, round, dome-topp'd, lofty, utterly absurd for any such purpose, and full of thundering echoes; with a little lofty crow's-nest of a stone gallery, breast high, deep in the wall, into which it was designed to put—*me!* I instantly struck, of course; and said I would either read in a room attached to this house (a very snug one,

capable of holding 500 people), or not at all. Terrified local agents glowered, but fell prostrate, and my men took the primitive accommodation in hand. Ever since, I am alarmed to add, the people (who besought the honour of the visit) have been coming in numbers quite irreconcilable with the appearance of the place, and what is to be the end I do not know. It was poor Arthur Smith's principle that a town on the way paid the expenses of a long through-journey, and therefore I came.

Forster adds "The Reading paid more than those expenses."

To Miss Hogarth he wrote as follows:

I write (in a gale of wind, with a high sea running) to let you know that we go on to Edinburgh at half-past eight to-morrow morning.

A most ridiculous room was designed for me in this odd out-of-the-way place. An immense Corn Exchange made of glass and iron, round, dome-topped, lofty, utterly absurd for any such purpose, and full of thundering echoes, with a little lofty crow's-nest of a stone gallery breast high, deep in the wall, into which it was designed to put me! I instantly struck, of course, and said I would either read in a room attached to the house (a very snug one, capable of holding five hundred people) or not at all. Terrified local agents glowered, but fell prostrate.

We left Newcastle yesterday morning in the dark, when it was intensely cold and froze very hard. So it did here. But towards night the wind went round to the S.W., and all night it has been blowing very hard indeed. So it is now. Tell Mamie that I have the same sitting room as we had when we came here with poor Arthur and that my bed room is the room out of it which she and Katie had. Surely it is the oddest town to read in.

CHAPTER TEN

A LAZY TOUR FOR IDLE DICKENSANS

I

IT was on August 29th, 1857, after some very successful amateur acting at Manchester in aid of the Douglas Jerrold Testimonial, that Dickens wrote to Wilkie Collins, 'Partly in the grim despair and res lessness of this subsidence from excitement, and partly for the sake of *Household Words* :

I want to cast about whether you and I can go anywhere—take any tour—see anything—whereon we could write something together. Have you any idea tending to any place in the world? Will you rattle your head and see if there is any pebble in it which we could wander away and play marbles with?

Collins was agreeable and a few days later we find Dickens writing to his brother-in-law, Henry Austin:

On Monday I am going away with Collins for ten days or a fortnight, on a "tour in search of an article" for *Household Words*. We have not the least idea where we are going: but he says "Let's look at the Norfolk coast" and I say "Let's look at the back of the Atlantic." I don't quite know what I mean by that; but have a general impression that I mean something knowing.

To Forster he wrote in somewhat the same strain:

I have arranged with Collins that he and I will start next Monday on a ten or twelve days' expedition to out-of-the-way places, to do (in inns and coast-corners) a little tour in search of an article and in avoidance of railroads. I must get a good name for it, and I propose it in five articles, one for the beginning of every number in the October part.

Forster tells us that Dickens was "looking over the 'Beauties of England and Wales' when his ambition was fired

by mention of Carrick Fell 'a gloomy old mountain 1,500 feet high,' which he secretly resolved to go up" and thus it came about—that the Cumberland Lake District was chosen as the tour for the two ever active men who wished to believe they were idle, and a letter to Forster reads: "Our decision is for a foray upon the fells of Cumberland; I having discovered in the books some promising moors and bleak places there-about."

This was the beginning of *The Lazy Tour of Two Idle Apprentices* written by Dickens and Wilkie Collins for *Household Words*, and so deftly did the two mould themselves into one that, as Dickens himself wrote "I think you would find it very difficult to say where I leave off and he comes in."

They actually started off on September 7th by train to Carlisle, although the fictional record of the idle apprentices (of whom Goodchild was Dickens, and Idle, Collins) begins in a very humorous manner describing their "walking down into the North of England." Idle was doing it by "lying in a meadow, looking at the railway trains as they passed over a distant viaduct," that being his idea of the tour. Goodchild walked "a mile due South, against time—which was *his* idea of walking down into the North."

And as they had not gone beyond the fifth milestone from London, and nobody ever did walk these distances: "they came back and said they did, but they didn't"; decided on "falling back upon Euston Square Terminus . . . and walked down into the North by the next morning's express, and carried their knapsacks in the luggage-van."

II

Carlisle was their first town. "It looked congenially and delightfully idle. Something in the way of public amusement had happened last month." But on market morning "Carlisle woke up amazingly and became . . . disagreeably and reproachfully busy" with its cattle market, its corn market and its general market and the Lowland Rob Roys from over the border, all crowding the main street.

Dickens gave readings in Carlisle in 1861, on Monday and Tuesday, December 9th and 10th, at the Athenæum Hall in Lowther Street, now the Gretna Tavern.

Gretna Green is mentioned in connection with runaway marriages in a very early sketch by Boz, "The Great Winklebury Duel" and also in that delightful story told by the

Boots at The Holly Tree Inn, but it was never made the scene of any incident in either story. It has been stated that Dickens visited Gretna and had a chat with the Blacksmith during this Lazy Tour, but we are not able to find any confirmation. It is more probable that Gretna Green was visited at a much earlier date, in the June of 1841 when Dickens and his wife spent two weeks in Scotland, and wrote to Forster urging him to accompany them: "Think of such a fortnight. York, Carlisle, Berwick, your own Borders, Edinburgh, Rob Roy's country, railroads, cathedrals, country inns, Arthur's Seat, lochs, glens and home by sea."

The idlers "rode away from Carlisle at eight o'clock one forenoon bound for the village of Heske Newmarket some fourteen miles distant." Now the reason for this was that Dickens—so he told Forster—had read "of a certain black old Cumberland hill called Carrock Fell" and determined to climb it. And the result was that Collins fell and badly sprained his ankle; this meant a considerable delay and a curtailment of the tour which has deprived us of some very interesting descriptions of the Lake District.

From Carlisle they viewed Skiddaw in the distance, and unfortunately, that peak is rather slightly described as vaunting itself "a great deal more than its merits deserve: but that is rather the way of the Lake Country." We are afraid Dickens spoke with a lack of knowledge—or perhaps those were Collins's words, produced when the pain of the ankle was unusually acute!

When they came to the village of Hesket Newmarket, 14 miles away, it is described as composed of "black, coarse stoned, rough-windowed houses: some with outer staircases like Swiss houses; a sinuous and stony gutter winding up hill and round the corner, by way of street." Curiously enough nothing is said about the quaint market house which is an arresting feature of the village.

Kitton states that the inn, at which the pair put up, was the Queen's Head, now a dwelling-house, but still retaining the curious timbered ceiling to which Dickens refers.

The innkeeper was proud of his upstairs drawing-room "which was worth a visit to the Cumberland Fells" says Goodchild (Dickens): but Idle (Collins) so we read, did not agree with this. We may therefore assume that the description of the room "so crossed and recrossed by beams of unequal lengths radiating from a centre, in a corner, that it looked like a broken star fish" with its various "ornaments

and nick-nacks" all described in detail, and its pictures and books, was undoubtedly Dickens's very own.

The book gives a description of the ascent of Carrock and what befell the idlers, an actual experience, as the following extract from a letter to Forster shows :

We came, straight to it yesterday. Nobody goes up. Guides have forgotten it. Master of a little inn, excellent north-countryman, volunteered. Went up, in a tremendous rain. C. D. beat Mr. Porter (name of landlord) in half a mile. Mr. P. done up in no time. Three nevertheless went on. Mr. P. again leading; C. D. and C. (Mr. Wilkie Collins) following. Rain terrific, black mists, darkness of night. Mr. P. agitated. C. D. confident. C. (a long way down in perspective) submissive. All wet through. No poles. Not so much as a walking-stick in the party. Reach the summit at about one in the day. Dead darkness as of night. Mr. P. (excellent fellow to the last) uneasy. C. D. produces compass from pocket. Mr. P. reassured. Farm-house where dog-cart was left, N.N.W. Mr. P. complimentary. Descent commenced. C. D. with compass triumphant, until compass, with the heat and wet of C. D.'s pocket, breaks. Mr. P. (who never had a compass), inconsolable, confesses he has not been on Carrick Fell for twenty years, and he don't know the way down. Darker and darker. Nobody discernible two yards off, by the other two. Mr. P. makes suggestions, but no way. It becomes clear to C. D. and to C. that Mr. P. is going round and round the mountain, and never coming down. Mr. P. sits on angular granite, and says he is "just fairly doon." C. D. revives Mr. P. with laughter, the only restorative in the company. Mr. P. again complimentary. Descent tried once more. Mr. P. worse and worse. Council of war. Proposals from C. D. to go "slap down." Seconded by C. Mr. P. objects, on account of precipice called The Black Arches, and terror of the countryside. More wandering. Mr. P. terror-stricken, but game. Watercourse, thundering and roaring, reached. C. D. suggests that it must run to the river, and had best be followed, subject to all gymnastic hazards. Mr. P. opposes, but gives in. Watercourse followed accordingly. Leaps, splashes, and tumbles, for two hours. C. lost. C. D. whoops. Cries for assistance from behind. C. D. returns. C. with horribly sprained ankle, lying in rivulet.

We got down at last in the wildest place, preposterously out of the course; and, propping up C. against stones, sent Mr. P. to the other side of Cumberland for dog-cart, so got back to his inn, and changed. Shoe or stocking on the bad foot out of the question. Foot bundled up in a flannel waistcoat. C. D. carrying C. melo-dramatically (Wardour to the life) everywhere; into and out of carriages; up and down stairs; to bed; every step. And so to Wigton, got doctor, and here we are! A pretty business, we flatter ourselves!

To his sister-in-law he wrote a more concise account in a letter from Allonby dated Wednesday, September 9th, 1857:

Think of Collins's usual luck with me. We went up a Cumberland mountain yesterday—a huge black hill, fifteen hundred feet high. We took for a guide a capital inn-keeper hard by. It rained in torrents—as it only does rain in a hill country—the whole time. At the top, there were black mists and the darkness of night. It then came out that the inn-keeper had not been up for twenty years, and he lost his head and himself altogether; and we couldn't get down again! What wonders the Inimitable performed with his compass until it broke with the heat and wet of his pocket no matter; it did break, and then we wandered about, until it was clear to the Inimitable that the night must be passed there, and the enterprising travellers probably die of cold. We took our own way about coming down, struck, and declared that the guide might wander where he would, but we would follow a watercourse we lighted upon, and which must come at last to the river. This necessitated amazing gymnastics; in the course of which performances, Collins fell into the said watercourse with his ankle sprained, and the great ligament of the foot swollen I don't know how big.

How I enacted Wardour over again in carrying him down, and what a business it was to get him down; I may say in Gibb's words: "Vi lascio a giudicare!" but he was got down somehow and we got off the mountain somehow; and now I carry him to bed, and into and out of carriages, exactly like Wardour in private life. I don't believe he will stand for a month to come. He has had a doctor, and can wear neither shoe nor stocking, and has his foot wrapped up in a flannel waistcoat, and has a breakfast saucer of liniment, and a horrible dabbling of lotion incessantly in progress. We laugh at it all, but I doubt

very much whether he can go on to Doncaster. It will be a miserable blow to our H. W. scheme, and I say nothing about it as yet; but he is really so crippled that I doubt the getting him there. We have resolved to fall to work to-morrow morning and begin our writing; and there, for the present, that point rests.

The book adds a feeling remark of Idle's in describing the ascent. "Was it for this that Thomas had left London? London, where there are nice short walks in level public gardens, with benches of repose set up at convenient distances."

III

They got Collins to the nearest village, Wigton, 11 miles away, after a long ride through the rain, the people they passed thinking no more of it "than if it were sunshine."

The inn into which Idle was "melodramatically carried . . . to the first floor and laid upon three chairs," was the King's Arms, one of no less than 25 inns then existing at Wigton.

"Brother Francis" then "took an observation of Wigton" and reported:

I see what I hope and believe to be one of the most dismal places ever seen by eyes . . . I see a very big gas lamp in the centre (of the market place) which I know by a secret instinct will not be lighted to-night. I see a pump with a trivet underneath its spout whereon to stand the vessels that are brought in to be filled with water. I see a man come to pump and he pumps away hard, but no water follows and he strolls empty away.

Canon Rawnsley in his interesting book "Chapters at the English Lakes" devotes some space to the Lazy tour, with identifications, to which we are indebted. He tells us that the present granite fountain occupies the site of the lamp and pump above referred to and that the original pump is now at Highmoor Hall.

Dickens still in the character of Brother Francis, also saw "one, two, three, four, five linen draper's shops" in front of him. "I see a linen draper's shop next door to the right, and there are five more linen draper's shops down the corner to the left. Eleven homicidal linen drapers' shops within a short stone's throw."

Actually says Canon Rawnsley, there were no less than seven draper's shops within sight of the inn.

This was also referred to in a letter written home at the time:

We lay last night at a place called Wigton—also in half-mourning—with the wonderful peculiarity that it had no population, no business, no streets to speak of; but five linendrapers within range of our small windows, one linendraper's next door, and five more linendrapers round the corner. I ordered a night-light in my bedroom. A queer little old woman brought me one of the common Child's night-lights, and seeming to think that I looked at it with interest, said: "It's joost a vera keeyourious thing, sir, and joost new coom eop. It'll burn awt hoors a' end, an' no goother, nor no waste, nor ony sike a thing, if you can creedit what I say, se :in' the airticle."

They were timed to be at Maryport but for this accident, and it was here Dickens expected letters, so he solved the difficulty in a manner especially his own, as his letter to Forster tells:

The day after Carrick there was a mess about our letters, through our not going to a place called Maryport. So, while the landlord was planning how to get them (they were only twelve miles off), I walked off, to his great astonishment, and brought them over.

Dickens discovered that Maryport was a preferable place. And thus he pictured it to the lamed Idle:

I go to a region which is a bit of water side Bristol with a slice of Wapping, a seasoning of Wolverhampton and a garnish of Portsmouth . . . a great deal too rusty and a great deal too muddy . . . with whips to load, and pitch and tar to boil, and iron to hammer, and steam to get up and smoke to make.

He further describes going into "jagged up-hill and down-hill streets, where I am in the pastrycook's shop at one moment and next moment in savage fastnesses of moor and morass, beyond the confines of civilisation."

Leaving Wigton, the next night was actually spent at Allonby, but in the narrative the journey is lengthened, and Allonby is represented as the place from which Goodchild walked to Maryport for the letters.

Their journey is humorously described, with Idle in a carriage and Goodchild "fagging up hills and scouring down hills" congratulating himself "on attaining a high point of

idleness," during a long day, and, it is stated "There are reasons . . . for not publically indicating the exact direction in which that journey lay, or the place in which it ended."

Canon Rawnsley thinks that Ireby was the village referred to.

It was at a little town, still in Cumberland, that they halted for the night—a very little town with the purple and brown moor close upon its one street: a curious little ancient market-cross set up in the midst of it: and the town itself looking much as if it were a collection of great stones piled on end by the Druids long ago, which a few recluse people had since hollowed out for habitations.

Here Dr. Speddie (actually Dr. Speake) attended to Idle, which led to the telling of the story about Arthur Holliday and the Doncaster Races.

The next day they managed to get to Allonby which Mr. Goodchild had discovered—from the county map—was "the most delicious piece of sea-coast to be found . . . on the coast of Cumberland." It was "approached by a coach road, from a railway station called Aspatria" shortened by the Cumberland people into "Spatter." And they came to "the most delightful place ever seen" to the Ship Hotel presided over by "the most comfortable of landladies . . . and the most attentive of landlords."

The account goes on to give a good description of this primitive place, of no street, with plenty of fishermen who never fished, but "got their living entirely by looking at the ocean" and a number of children "who were always upside down on the public buildings (two small bridges over the brook) . . . The houses people lodged in were nowhere in particular, and were in capital accordance with the beach."

In a letter to Forster we are given a further description of Allonby:

A small, untidy, outlandish place; rough stone houses in half mourning, a few coarse yellow-stone lodging-houses with black roofs (bills in all the windows), five bathing-machines, five girls in straw hats, five men in straw hats (wishing they had not come); very much what Broadstairs would have been if it had been born Irish, and had not inherited a cliff.

and to Miss Hogarth he wrote at the same time:

This is a little place with fifty houses, five bathing-machines, five girls in straw hats, five men in straw hats, and no other company. The little houses are all in half-mourning—yellow stone on white stone, and black; and it reminds me of what Broadstairs might have been if it had not inherited a cliff, and had been an Irishman. But this is a capital little homely inn, looking out upon the sea; and we are really very comfortably lodged. I can just stand upright in my bedroom. Otherwise, it is a good deal like one of Ballard's top-rooms. We have a very obliging and comfortable landlady; and it is a clean nice place in a rough wild country. We came here haphazard, but could not have done better.

The Ship Hotel, which still exists, was further described in the letter to Forster:

But this is a capital little homely inn, looking out upon the sea; with the coast of Scotland, mountainous and romantic, over against the windows; and though I can just stand upright in my bedroom, we are really well lodged. It is a clean nice place in a rough wild country, and we have a very obliging and comfortable landlady.

In a later letter to Miss Hogarth, on September 12th, we find that, curiously enough, the landlady had made Dickens's acquaintance some twenty years before:

The landlady of the little inn at Allonby lived at Greta Bridge, in Yorkshire, when I went down there before "Nickleby" and was smuggled into the room to see me, when I was secretly found out. She is an immensely fat woman now. "But I could tuck my arm round her waist then, Mr. Dickens," the landlord said when she told me the story as I was going to bed the night before last. "And can't you do it now" I said, "you insensible dog? Look at me! Here's a picture!" Accordingly I got round as much of her as I could; and this gallant action was the most successful I have ever performed, on the whole. I think it was the dullest little place I ever entered; and what with the monotony of an idle sea, and what with the monotony of another sea in the room (occasioned by Collins's perpetually holding his ankle over a pail of salt water, and laving it with a milk jug), I struck yesterday, and came away.

They remained at Allonby for two days—and much enjoyed the fine sunsets, "when the low flat beach, with its pools of

water and its dry patches, changed into long bars of silver and gold in various states of burnishing."

IV

Wilkie Collins got better, and, tiring of the eternal sea and the equally eternal shrimps, they set off to find an idle place in a railway station, and "journeyed on and on, until they came to such a station where there was an Inn."

This was Carlisle. In a letter from Lancaster dated September 12th, Dickens wrote: "We came back to Carlisle last night, to a capital inn, kept by Breach's brother." This was the County Hotel, next to the station, managed at the time by Benj. Bodmin Breach.

But they did not find solace at "the Junction," and so proceeded to Lancaster.

"I have heard there is a good old Inn at Lancaster established in a fine old house: an Inn where they give you Bride cake every day after dinner" said Thomas Idle.

So to "eat Bride-cake without the trouble of being married . . . they departed from the station in a violent hurry . . . and were delivered at the fine old house at Lancaster, on the same night."

Canon Rawnsley quotes in his book, to which we have already referred, the following interesting letter, dated September 11th, 1857, addressed to the King's Arms at Lancaster:

Mr. Charles Dickens sends his compliments to the master of the King's Arms at Lancaster and begs to say he wishes to bespeak for to-morrow, Saturday afternoon and night, a private sitting-room, two bedrooms, and also a comfortable dinner for two persons at half-past five. Mr. Dickens will be accompanied by his friend Mr. Wilkie Collins, and as Mr. Collins has unfortunately sprained his leg, it will be of great convenience to him if his bedroom is as near the sitting-room as possible. For the same reason Mr. Dickens will be glad to find a fly awaiting them at the station. They purpose leaving here by the midday train at 12.38.

The King's Arms was at that time kept by a Mr. Sly. It was at the corner of Market Street and King's Street, and of quaint architecture with broad windows from roof to

basement, and a pillared entrance doorway. It was pulled down in 1879, and another hotel erected on its site.

The Bride-cake story was no fiction of Dickens: it originated in a traditional murder of a bride in the room with the black oak bedstead in which Dickens himself slept; the murderer being hanged at Lancaster Castle.

The following description of the house bears the stamp of Dickens:

The house was a genuine old house of a very quaint description, teeming with old carvings and beams and panels, and having an excellent old staircase with a gallery and upper staircase cut off from it by a curious fence-work of old oak, or of the old Honduras mahogany wood . . . a remarkably picturesque house.

In a letter home at the same time, this is what he reported of the King's Arms:

We are in a very remarkable old house here, with genuine old rooms and a1 uncommonly quaint staircase. I have a state bedroom, with two enormous red four-posters in it, each as big as Charley's room at Gad's Hill. Bellew is to preach here to-morrow. "And we know he is a friend of yours, sir," said the landlord, when he presided over the serving of the dinner (two little salmon trout; a sirloin steak; a brace of partridges; seven dishes of sweets; five dishes of dessert led off by a bowl of peaches; and in the centre an enormous bride-cake)—"We always have it here, sir," said the landlord, "custom of the house." (Collins turned pale, and estimated the dinner at half a guinea each.)

As a memento of his visit, Dickens presented Mr. Sly with a portrait of himself, inscribed "To his good friend Mr. Sly."

Dickens described Lancaster as "A pleasant place, a place dropped in the midst of a charming landscape, a place with a fine ancient castle, a place of lovely walks, a place possessing staid old houses richly filled with old Honduras mahogany."

But he added a remark "protesting against being obliged to live in a trench," and then went on to say that "if a visitor on his arrival could be accommodated with a pole which could push the opposite side of the street some yards further off, it would be better for all parties."

Dickens—in the capacity of Mr. Goodchild—visited the lunatic asylum at Lancaster, which he described as "an immense place . . . admirable offices, very good arrange-

ments, very good attendants; altogether a remarkable place," adding that he saw there "long groves of blighted men-and-women trees: interminable avenues of hopeless faces."

The reception they had at Carlisle and Lancaster was referred to by Dickens in an interesting letter to Miss Hogarth:

Accustomed as you are to the homage which men delight to render to the Inimitable, you would be scarcely prepared for the proportions it assumes in this northern country. Station-masters assist him to alight from carriages, deputations await him in hotel entries, innkeepers bow down before him and put him into regal rooms, the town goes down to the platform to see him off, and Collins's ankle goes into the newspapers!!!

It is a great deal better than it was, and he can get into new hotels and up the stairs with two thick sticks, like an admiral in a farce. His spirits have improved in a corresponding degree, and he contemplates cheerfully the keeping house at Doncaster. I thought (as I told you) he would never have gone there, but he seems quite up to the mark now. Of course he can never walk out, or see anything of any place. We have done our first paper for H.W., and sent it up to the printer's.

Lancaster and the King's Arms are both mentioned in *Doctor Marigold's Prescriptions*, written in 1865:

We were down at Lancaster, and I had done two nights more than fair average business (though I cannot in honour recommend them as a quick audience) in the open square there, near the end of the street where Mr. Sly's King's Arms and Royal Hotel stands. Mim's travelling giant, otherwise Pickleson, happened at the self-same time to be trying it on in the town. The genteel lay was adopted with him. No hint of a van. Green baize alcove leading up to Pickleson in a Auction Room.

And it was between Lancaster and Carlisle that Dr. Marigold again discovered the "strange young man" following the van. He turned out to be deaf and dumb, like the Sophy whom he subsequently married.

From Lancaster the Idle apprentices went to Doncaster by way of Leeds, of which, unfortunately, Dickens did not appear to have a very good opinion.

Dickens's first recorded visit to Leeds was in 1847, when he presided at a soiree of the Leeds Mechanics' Institution on December 1st in the Music Hall, Albion Street. Among the other speakers was George Stephenson. This was the third such institute that Dickens had addressed on the subject of the excellent educational work they were doing, and in his concluding remarks he expressed the hope "that institutions such as this will be the means of refining and improving that social edifice which has been so often mentioned to-night, until . . . it shall end in sweet accord and harmony amongst all classes of its builders," and he closed with this expression of his earnest desires:

"Ladies and Gentlemen, most respectfully and heartily I bid you good-night and good-bye, and trust the next time we meet it will be in even greater numbers, and in a larger room, and that we often shall meet again to recall this evening, then of the past, and remember it as one of a series of increasing triumphs of your excellent institution."

The Institution is still flourishing and is known as the Leeds Institute of Science, Art and Literature, and occupies a handsome building in Cookridge Street.

Dickens, however, does not appear to have met the Leeds people again for more than ten years, when he appeared before them as a reader from his own works on September 15th, 1858.

In the meantime, however, the Lazy Tour took him there in September, 1857.

Leeds has changed wondrously since Idle and Goodchild arrived at the station with "a little rotten platform (converted into artificial touchwood by smoke and ashes) " by way of the "branchless woods of vague black chimneys . . . of the manufacturing bosom of Yorkshire." The great manufacturing towns "looked in the cinderous wet, as though they had one and all been on fire and were just put out."

Of the "enterprising and important centre of Leeds," Dickens remarked that "it may be observed with delicacy that you must either like it very much or not at all." And he emphasised his dislike of Leeds in a letter to Miss Hogarth from Lancaster on September 12th, 1857, when, proposing to go to Doncaster on the following day (Sunday) he wrote that he found the trains so inconvenient that he feared he would have to sleep the night at Leeds, "which I particularly detest as an odious place."

They put up at the Scarborough Arms, now the Scarborough Hotel, in Bishopsgate Street, close to the station, and on the reading visit recalled in a letter to his daughter dated from the hotel on September 15th, 1858, "Oddly enough, I slept in this house three days last year with Wilkie. Arthur has the bedroom I occupied then, and I have one, two doors from it, and Gordon has the one between."

It is significant to note that although he thought Leeds "an odious place," he was content to stay three days there on one occasion, presumably by referring to Wilkie Collins being with him, during this "lazy tour," although, according to his letters at the time, they were at Lancaster on Saturday, September 12th, and at Doncaster on Monday, the 14th, which would not allow for more than one night at Leeds on that occasion.

When Dickens visited Leeds for his first reading there, he wrote to his daughter Mamie,

This place I have always doubted, knowing that we should come here when it was recovering from the double excitement of the festival and the Queen. But there is a very large hall let indeed, and the prospect of to-night consequently looks bright.

These streets look like a great circus with the season just finished. All sorts of garish triumphal arches were put up for the Queen, and they have got smoky, and have been looked out of countenance by the sun, and are blistered and patchy, and half up and half down, and are hideous to behold. Spiritless men (evidently drunk for some time in the royal honour) are slowly removing them, and on the whole it is more like the clearing away of "The Frozen Deep" at Tavistock House than anything within your knowledge—with the exception that we are not in the least sorry, as we were then.

The return visit above foreshadowed was on October 28th, "The hall overflowed in half an hour," says Forster; so we may judge of his reception. Even prior to the reading he had thought of returning, for in the above-mentioned letter he wrote:

Vague ideas are in Arthur's head that when we come back to Hull, we are to come here, and are to have the Town Hall (a beautiful building), and read to the million. I can't say yet. That depends. I remember that when I was here before (I came from Rockingham to make a speech)

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I thought them a dull and slow audience. I hope I may have been mistaken. I never saw better audiences than the Yorkshire audiences generally.

Meanwhile he was in Leeds on October 19th, 1859, as a resting-place between readings at Peterborough and Bradford, for we find him writing from the former place, "The difficulty of getting to Bradford from here to-morrow, at any time convenient to us, turned out to be so great, that we are all going to Leeds (only three-quarters of an hour from Bradford) to-night after the reading."

Dickens read again in Leeds on January 31st, February 1st and March 6th, 1867.

The town was included in the Farewell Readings of 1869, when he read at the Mechanics' Institute on Friday, April 16th. Only two readings intervened before he broke down at Preston, and he had to abandon the series of Farewell Readings in the Provinces.

VI

Doncaster must have come as an afterthought to the two industrious idlers; it was never a part of their original intention to visit that town, but the facility for reaching it on their way home, no doubt, led them to stop to make observations of the characters to be found on the St. Leger Race day.

Accordingly on Monday, September 14th, they arrived and took up their quarters in the Angel Hotel, which Dickens described in a letter to Miss Hogarth as "very good, clean and quiet apartments, on the second floor, looking down into the main street, which is full of horse jockeys, bettors, drunkards and other blackguards, from morning to night—and all night."

Wilkie Collins was fast getting better, and Dickens remarked:

He can hobble up and down stairs when absolutely necessary, and limps to his bedroom on the same floor. He talks of going to the theatre to-night in a cab, which will be the first occasion of his going out, except to travel, since the accident. He sends his kind regards and thanks for enquiries and condolence. I am perpetually tidying the rooms after him, and carrying all sorts of untidy things which belong to him into his bedroom, which is a picture of disorder. You will please to imagine mine, airy and clean, little dressing-room attached, eight water-jugs (I never saw such a supply), capital sponge-bath, perfect

arrangement, and exquisite neatness. We breakfast at half-past eight, and fall to work for H.W. afterwards. Then I go out, and—hem! look for subjects.

Collins, we are told, "once established in the hotel, with his leg on one cushion and his back against another, formally declined taking the slightest interest in any circumstance whatever connected with the races." He was, as Goodchild said of him, "absolutely and literally . . . the only individual in Doncaster who stands by the brink of the full-flowing race stream, and is not swept away by it in common with all the rest of the species."

The attraction of the races was not the sole topic of the town's interest, for the letter informs us that a civic reception of the two authors was proposed, and declined.

The mayor called this morning to do the honours of the town, whom it pleased the Inimitable to receive with great courtesy and affability. He propounded invitation to public *dejeuner*, which it did *not* please the Inimitable to receive, and which he graciously rejected.

The story of Arthur Holliday, told by the Cumberland Doctor, Mr. Speddie, concerns an adventure in Doncaster in "the middle of a race week" and has for its theme the difficulty in securing a bed at that time "at the principal hotel" and what happened when a bed was ultimately secured at an inn on the outskirts called the Two Robins: a weird story, probably the only portion of the journal of the tour that was written solely by Collins.

They stayed the week through: as he explained in his letter dated Tuesday, September 15th :

The races begin to-day and last till Friday, which is the Cup Day. I am not going to the course this morning, but have engaged a carriage (open, and pair) for to-morrow and Friday . . . That's all the news. Everything I can describe by hook or by crook, I describe for H. W. So there is nothing of that sort left for letters.

In spite of that, however, he did write at least one descriptive letter to Forster, who thus introduces it: "The impressions received from the race-week were not favourable. It was noise and turmoil all day long, and a gathering of vagabonds from all parts of the racing earth. Every bad face that had ever caught wickedness from an innocent horse had its representative in the streets; and as Dickens, like Gulliver looking down upon his fellow-men after coming

from the horse country, looked down into Doncaster High Street from his inn-window, he seemed to see everywhere a then notorious personage who had just poisoned his betting-companion."

Everywhere I see the late Mr. Palmer with his betting-book in his hand. Mr. Palmer sits next me at the theatre; Mr. Palmer goes before me down the street; Mr. Palmer follows me into the chemist's shop where I go to buy rose water after breakfast, and says to the chemist "Give us soom sal volatile or soom damned thing o' that soort, in wather —my head's bad!" And I look at the back of his bad head repeated in long, long lines on the race course, and in the betting stand and outside the betting rooms in the town, and I vow to God that I can see nothing in it but cruelty, covetousness, calculation, nsensibility, and low wickedness.

"Even a half-appealing kind of luck was not absent from my friend's experiences at the racecourse" adds Forster, "when, what he called a 'wonderful, paralysing, coincidence' befell him. He bought the card; facetiously wrote down three names for the winners of the three chief races (never in his life having heard or thought of any of the horses, except that the winner of the Derby, who proved to be nowhere, had been mentioned to him); 'and, if you can believe it without your hair standing on end, those three races were won, one after another, by those three horses!!!' That was the St. Leger day, of which he also thought it noticeable, that, though the losses were enormous, nobody had won, for there was nothing but grinding of teeth and blaspheming of ill-luck. Nor had matters mended on the Cup day, after which celebration 'a groaning phantom' lay in the doorway of his bedroom and howled all night. The landlord came up in the morning to apologise, 'and said it was a gentleman who had lost £1,500 or £2,000; and he had drunk a deal afterwards; and then they put him to bed, and then he—took the terrors, and got up, and yelled till morning!'"

VII

The lazy tour of the idle apprentices ended at Doncaster, but we idle Dickensians have a little more concern with one or two other Yorkshire towns; and this being a real idle tour, we will give a glance at them before we end it.

One of the earliest readings by Dickens in aid of the funds of Working Men's Institutes, was given in Bradford.

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Forster tells us that on the 27th January, 1854, Dickens wrote him:

After correspondence with all parts of England, and every kind of refusal and evasion on my part, I am now obliged to decide this question—whether I shall read two nights at Bradford for a hundred pounds. If I do I may take as many hundred pounds as I choose.

At first, explains Forster, this was entertained, but was abandoned “with some reluctance, upon the argument that to become publicly a reader must alter without improving his position publicly as a writer, and that it was a change to be justified only when the higher calling should have failed of old success . . . The readings mentioned came off as promised, in aid of public objects,” and the one at Bradford on behalf of the Bradford Temperance Educational Institute was arranged for Thursday, December 28th, 1854, at St. George’s Hall, on which day Dickens wrote to Forster from Bradford:

The hall is enormous, and they expect to seat 3,700 people to-night. Notwithstanding which, it seems to me a tolerably easy place—except that the width of the platform is so very great to the eye at first.

To his friend, Mrs. Watson, he had written the month before that he had to go “to Bradford in Yorkshire to read . . . to a little fireside party of four thousand.”

Two of his letters, written on the third of the month following the reading, have a bearing on this visit. The first, to his French friend, de Cerjat, tells of the wonderful reception he was given:

I am but newly come home from reading at Reading (where I succeeded poor Talfourd as the president of an institution), and at Sherborne, in Dorsetshire, and at Bradford, in Yorkshire. Wonderful audiences! and the number at the last place three thousand seven hundred. And yet but for the noise of their laughing and cheering, they “went” like one man.

To Miss Mary Boyle he wrote in lighter strain:

I have just been reading my *Christmas Carol* in Yorkshire. I should have lost my heart to the beautiful young landlady of my hotel (age 29, dress black frock and jacket, exquisitely braided), if it had not been safe in your possession.

Readings for his own benefit were subsequently given at Bradford on October 14th, 1858, October 20th, 1859, and March 1st, 1867.

To Wakefield, Dickens paid two visits, the first on 9th September 1858, and then again on the 7th March, 1867, and on both occasions read in the Corn Exchange.

Halifax was visited only once on the reading tours, and that was on September 16th, 1858, at the Oddfellows Hall, now the home of the Friendly and Trades Council, after which he wrote:

Halifax was too small for us. I never saw such an audience though. They were really worth reading to for nothing, though I didn't do exactly that. It is as horrible a place as I ever saw, I think.

The trains are so strange and unintelligible in this part of the country, that we were obliged to leave Halifax at eight this morning and breakfast on the road—at Huddersfield again, where we had an hour's wait.

VIII

Sheffield is mentioned but once in the novels of Dickens; but that once has become a world-famous expression. "Brooks of Sheffield" was the name given by Mr. Murdstone to little David Copperfield, when his friend, Mr. Quinion, was twitting him about his attachment for the charming widow. It is said that Dickens hit upon the name "Brooks" as a better-fitting name than Smith or Brown, and was unaware at the time that there was a cutlery manufacturer of that name actually in Sheffield. But we rather think the reverse to be the case; Dickens knew the relation of Brooks with cutlery, and used the name, just as he used other colloquial phrases.

In later years he became acquainted with a Mr. Brookes, the proprietor of a cutlery firm, and presented him with a volume of *David Copperfield* inscribed "To Brookes, of Sheffield, from Charles Dickens, May 1851."

So far as we can trace, Dickens' first visit to Sheffield, or at least his first public visit, was on August 20th, 1852, when in company with his friends of the Guild of Literature and Art he appeared at the Music Hall in "Not So Bad As We Seem," in aid of the funds.

He stayed at the Royal Hotel in Haymarket, since demolished. His next visit was on December 22nd, 1855, when he came from Paris to read *A Christmas Carol* in the Lecture Hall in aid of the funds of the Mechanics' Institute. "Think

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of my going down to Sheffield on Friday (December 21st) to read there—in the bitter winter—with journey back to Paris, before me" he wrote. After the reading Dickens was presented with a case of cutlery, a pair of silver fish carvers and a pair of razors, all the product of local works.

Writing of this reading Dickens said:

Enormous success at Sheffield . . . they were most enthusiastically demonstrative, and they took the line "and to Tiny Tim who did NOT die" with a most prodigious shout and roll of thunder.

Three years later, on September 17th, 1858, Dickens gave a paid reading at the Music Hall. During this visit he stayed at the King's Head in Change Alley, since rebuilt, and from which he wrote:

The run upon the tickets here is so immense that Arthur is obliged to get bills out, signifying that no more can be sold. It will be by no means easy to get into the place the numbers who have already paid. It is the hall we acted in, crammed to the roof and the passages.

So many were unable to obtain admission to this reading that Dickens had to pay a return visit on October 29th.

The next visit was more than ten years later, this time under the auspices of the Sheffield Athenæum. The reading was again at the Music Hall, and the date March 31st, 1869. This building was later converted into a High School for girls, and is now the Central Lending Library and Reading Room.

IX

Dickens's first visit to Hull was on September 14th, 1858, when he read *A Christmas Carol* at the Music Hall in Jarratt Street, now known as the Assembly Rooms. Forster remarked of his great reception on that occasion. "At Hull the vast concourse had to be addressed by Mr. Smith (Dickens's manager) on the gallery stairs, and additional readings had to be given day and night, for the people out of town and for the people in town."

Of this Dickens has left a record in a letter to his daughter, Mamie, dated September 15th, 1858:

The Hull people (not generally considered excitable, even on their own showing) were so enthusiastic, that we were obliged to promise to go back there for two readings. I have positively resolved not to lengthen out the time of my tour, so we are now arranging to drop so

small places, and substitute Hull again and York again. . . . Arthur (Smith) told you, I suppose, that he had his shirt front and waistcoat torn off last night? He was perfectly enraptured in consequence. Our men got so knocked about that he gave them five shillings apiece on the spot. John passed several minutes upside-down against a wall, with his head amongst the people's boots. He came out of the difficulty in an exceedingly tousled condition, and with his face much flushed. For all this, and their being packed, as you may conceive they would be packed, they settled down the instant I went in, and never wavered in the closest attention for an instant. It was a very high room and required a great effort.

The last reading in Hull was on Wednesday, March 10th, 1869, also at the Music Hall. A further reading was fixed for the following Friday, but was cancelled owing to the funeral of Emerson Tennent, which Dickens attended, and to which we have already referred on page 209.

Dickens paid only one visit to Huddersfield on his reading tours, and that was on Wednesday, September 8th, 1858, when he read *A Christmas Carol* in the Gymnasium Hall in Ramsden Street.

X

We have now to refer to a few towns in the Midlands possessing a Dickens' interest, which did not come within the scope of our seventh chapter.

It was probably of Stafford, described as "one of the chiefest towns of Staffordshire . . . by no means a lively town" that Dickens wrote in "A Plated Article" in *Household Words*, afterwards published in *Reprinted Pieces*. Here we find a reference to "two old churchyards near to the High Street" and "the stiff square where the Town Hall stands like a brick and mortar private on parade."

The Dodo Inn at which he stayed is said to be a picture of The Swan:

I have paced the streets, and stared at the houses, and am come back to the blank bow window of the Dodo . . . If the Dodo were only a gregarious bird—if he had only some confused idea of making a comfortable nest—I could hope to get through the hours between this and bed-time, without being consumed by devouring melancholy. But, the Dodo's habits are all wrong. It provides me with a trackless desert of sitting-room, with a chair for every day in the year, a table for every month, and a waste of

sideboard where a lonely China vase pines in a corner for its mate long departed, and will never make a match with the candlestick in the opposite corner if it live till Doomsday. The Dodo has nothing in the larder. Even now, I behold the Boots returning with my sole in a piece of paper; and with that portion of my dinner, the Boots, perceiving me at the blank bow window, slaps his leg as he comes across the road, pretending it is something else. The Dodo excludes the outer air. When I mount up to my bed-room, a smell of closeness and flue gets lazily up my nose like sleepy snuff. The loose little bits of carpet writhe under my tread, and take wormy shapes. . . . The Dodo is narrow-minded as to towels; expects me to wash on a freemason's apron without the trimming: when I ask for soap, gives me a stony-hearted something white, with no more lather in it than the Elgin marbles. The Dodo has seen better days, and possesses interminable stables at the back—silent, grass-grown, broken-windowed, horseless. The mournful bird can fry a sole, however, which is much. Can cook a steak, too, which is more.

Stoke-on-Trent is also referred to in the same article. Whilst musing at the Dodo Inn, regarding a plate, he says:

Copeland! Stop a moment. Was it yesterday I visited Copeland's works, and saw them making plates? . . . Don't you remember (says the plate) how you steamed away, yesterday morning, in the bright sun and the east wind, along the valley of the sparkling Trent? Don't you recollect how many kilns you flew past, looking like the bowls of gigantic tobacco pipes, cut short off from the stem and turned upside down? And the fires—and the smoke—and the roads made with bits of crockery, as if all the paltes and dishes in the civilised world had been Macadamised, expressly for the laming of all the horses? Of course I do!

And don't you remember (says the plate) how you alighted at Stoke—a picturesque heap of houses, kilns, smoke, wharfs, canals, and river, lying (as was most appropriate) in a basin—and how, after climbing up the sides of the basin to look at the prospect, you trundled down again at a walking-match pace, and straight proceeded to my father's Copeland's, where the whole of my family, high and low, rich and poor, are turned out upon the world from our nursery and seminary?

It is evident from this that Dickens must have visited the Potteries at about this time, but we have no record. However, he gave one of his readings at Stoke-on-Trent on April 30th, 1867, and on the following evening he read at Hanley.

At Nottingham Dickens appeared with Lord Lytton's play, "Not So Bad As We Seem," for the benefit of the Guild of Literature and Art, on Monday, August 23rd, 1852, at the Mechanics' Hall.

He reported himself to Forster as "fresh as a daisy: walked from Nottingham to Derby."

He gave two readings at Nottingham; the first was on Thursday, October 21st, 1858, of which he wrote, "Last night at Nottingham was almost, if not quite, the most amazing we have had. It is not a very large place, and the room is by no means a very large one."

He was referring to the old Mechanics' Hall—where he had acted. His farewell reading at Nottingham was on Thursday, February 4th, 1869, when he was at the New Mechanics' Hall—a much larger building. On this occasion he stayed at the George Hotel.

Derby—16 miles from Nottingham, to which Dickens walked, after the acting in the latter town, was visited on August 25th, 1852, when "Not So Bad as We Seem" was acted in the Lecture Hall. "The Duke (of Devonshire) was at Derby" he wrote, "and no end of minor radiances."

The Readings also followed those at Nottingham, the first being on Friday, October 22nd, 1858, when he wrote from the Royal Hotel just before the reading, "Here it is a pretty room, but not large" and the third and last, on Friday, February 5th, 1869. In addition there was an intermediate one on January 24th, 1867.

The Lecture Hall where these meetings took place, as well as the Royal Hotel, are still in existence, pretty much as they were when Dickens was in the town: except that the old Doric Portico of the Lecture Hall has been pulled down in the widening of Wardwick.

At Leicester Dickens gave readings on Thursday, November 4th, 1858; Friday, January 25th, 1867, and on Friday, February 5th, 1869. These were given in the Temperance Hall—now converted into a picture house. Dickens stayed at the Bell Hotel on each occasion.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

THE HARD TIMES COUNTRY

I

THE country of that “triumph of fact,” Coketown, was necessarily centred in Lancashire, although we do not for one minute believe that Manchester stood for the principal place in *Hard Times*, in spite of some ardent Dickensians in that city wishing to claim it as such.

Coketown is another of the composite pictures to vie with Eatanswill and Muggleton, and it is a somewhat useless task to attempt to identify any one particular place as the original. Dickens's description of it was typical of the great Lancashire manufacturing towns:

It was a town of red brick, or of brick that would have been red if the smoke and ashes had allowed it; but as matters stood it was a town of unnatural red and black like the painted face of a savage. It was a town of machinery and tall chimneys, out of which interminable serpents of smoke trailed themselves for ever and ever, and never got uncoiled. It had a black canal in it, and a river that ran purple with ill-smelling dye, and vast piles of building full of windows where there was a rattling and trembling all day long, and where the piston of the steam-engine worked monotonously up and down, like the head of an elephant in a state of melancholy madness. It contained several large streets all very like one another, and many small streets still more like one another, inhabited by people equally like one another, who all went in and out at the same hours, with the same sound upon the same pavements, to do the same work, and to whom every day was the same as yesterday and to-morrow, and every year the counter-part of last and next.

We shall look in vain for Mr. Gradgrind's house, Stone Lodge, which we are told was “situated on a moor within

a mile or two of a great town, called Coketown in the present faithful guide-book," and for the house of Mr. Bounderby, which was situated on a hill, and was

A Red house with black outside shutters, green inside blinds a black street door up two white steps with "Bounderby" upon a brazen plate and a round brazen door handle underneath it, like a brazen full stop.

Nor has Mr. Bounderby's bank been located. It was "a size larger than Mr. Bounderby's house" but nevertheless strictly according to pattern . . . a red house with black outside shutters, green inside blinds, a black street door up two white steps, a brazen door plate and a brazen door handle full stop."

Neither have we discovered Pod's End and the Pegasus's Arms, where Mr. Sleary delivered his philosophy, "People mutht be amuthed, Thquive thomehow; they can't be alwayth a working, nor yet they can't be alwayth a learning. Make the betht of uth, not the wurht."

II

Manchester is proud of Dickens's long connection with the city.

His first visit appears to have been in the autumn of 1838, when on holiday with Phiz, as we have described in Chapter Seven. Forster had joined them at Liverpool and in the Diary, under date Tuesday, November 6th, there is this record, "3 fares to Manchester 3 times." We have unfortunately failed to find a reason for the three friends journeying to Manchester three times in the day—or possibly two days.

There is no doubt that it was during this time that Dickens met the brothers Grant, who stood for the famous Cheeryble Brothers in *Nicholas Nickleby*. It was to Harrison Ainsworth that Dickens owed the introduction, for this is what Forster has to say on the subject in the Life: "A friend now especially welcome, was the novelist Mr. Ainsworth . . . with whom we visited, . . . friends of art and letters in his native Manchester, from among whom Dickens brought away his Brothers Cheeryble."

It was at the house of Ainsworth's friend Gilbert Winter, who lived at the Stocks, Cheetham Hill Road (demolished in 1884), that Dickens met the two brothers Daniel and William. Their place of business was in Cannon Street, which before its demolition in 1907 was known as Cheeryble

House. Because Dickens in his Preface to *Nicholas Nickleby* made a reference to "Applications for loans, gifts and offices of profit that I have been requested to forward to the originals of the Brothers Cheeryble (with whom I never interchanged any communication in my life)," it has been urged that Dickens never actually met them. But the Rev. Hume Elliot in his exhaustive work, "The Story of the 'Cheeryble' Grants" satisfactorily shows that Dickens and the Grants actually did meet.

Those who were familiar with Manchester knew quite well whom Dickens had intended for the originals of the Brothers, and it is interesting to note that James Nasmyth the famous engineer tells in his Autobiography how he was helped in his young days by these "noble brothers," and says: "On this memorable day I had another introduction which proved of great service to me. It was to the Messrs. Grant, the famous Brothers Cheeryble of Dickens."

Dickens thus further wrote in the above-mentioned Preface: "The Brothers Cheeryble live . . . their liberal charity, their singleness of heart, their noble nature and their unbounded benevolence are no creatures of the Author's brain," and when William Grant died in 1842, Dickens, who was in America, wrote to Professor Felton: "One of the noble hearts who sat for the Cheeryble Brothers, is dead. If I had been in England, I would certainly have gone into mourning for the loss of such a glorious life."

The Brothers did not actually live in Manchester, but at Ramsbottom, and their memory is enshrined in a tablet at St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church there.

In about 1841 Dickens' elder sister, Fanny—who herself had received a musical training—married the operatic singer Henry Burnett, who had retired from the stage and settled in Manchester where he devoted himself to giving instruction in music—in which he was assisted by his wife.

The next recorded visit to Manchester was of a public nature. It was in October, 1843, when on the 5th, he presided at a soiree at the Athenæum there, following a bazaar held in aid of its funds. Speakers to follow him on this occasion were Cobden and Disraeli. His address referred principally to the matter always nearest his heart—the education of the very poor. He protested against the danger of calling a little learning dangerous and showed the unspeakable consolation and blessings that a little knowledge had shed on men of the lowest estate and most hopeless means.

In 1847 Dickens organised the first of his Amateur Theatricals for the benefit of necessitous men of letters. Two representations of Ben Jonson's comedy "Every Man in his Humour" were to be given for the benefit of Leigh Hunt, one at Manchester and the other at Liverpool. Talfourd wrote a special prologue which was spoken by Dickens who himself played Bobadil.

The play was given at the Theatre Royal on Monday, July 26th, 1847, and the receipts were no less than £440 12s. George Cruikshank, John Leech, Mark Lemon and Douglas Jerrold were among the famous actors.

On June 3rd, of the following year, Dickens and his amateur players were again at the Theatre Royal, Manchester, Dickens appearing in "The Merry Wives of Windsor" in aid of funds for a permanent curatorship of Shakespeare's house at Stratford-on-Avon.

In 1852 Dickens again played at Manchester, this time in the old Free Trade Hall in "Used Up" and "Mr. Nightingale's Diary,"—the latter by Dickens and Mark Lemon, in which Dickens played six parts. In this year two performances were given, one on February 11th and the other on September 1st, both for the benefit of the Guild of Literature and Art.

"The Manchester people sent a requisition after us to Liverpool" wrote Dickens to Lytton after the first performance, "to say that if we will go back there in May, when we act at Birmingham (as of course we shall) they will joyfully undertake to fill the Free Trade Hall again."

To quote Forster: "Manchester and Liverpool closed the trip with enormous success at both places; and Sir Edward Lytton was present at a public dinner which was given in the former city, Dickens's brief word about it being written as he was setting foot in the train that was to bring him to London. 'Bulwer spoke brilliantly at the Manchester dinner, and his earnestness and determination about the Guild was most impressive. It carried everything before it. They are now getting up annual subscriptions and will give us a revenue to begin with. I swear I believe that people to be the greatest in the world.'" Such was his tribute to the people of Manchester.

On Friday, July 31st, 1857, Dickens gave a free reading of *A Christmas Carol* at Free Trade Hall. Thus he referred to it in a letter to Macready: "I read at Manchester last Friday. As many thousand people were there as you like to mention."

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On August the 21st and 22nd of the same year Dickens played in "The Frozen Deep" at the same Hall in aid of the Douglas Jerrold Memorial Fund.

Dickens's brother Alfred died in Manchester in July 1860, and Dickens made a hurried visit there, as he explained in a letter to Forster :

I was telegraphed for to Manchester on Friday night. Arrived there at a quarter-past ten, but he had been dead three hours, poor fellow! He is to be buried at Highgate on Wednesday. I brought the poor young widow back with me yesterday.

Alfred Dickens had been previously living in York, where he was often visited by his famous brother (see page 209).

III

Dickens had so often been before the Manchester public in support of worthy objects, that it is not to be wondered at that when he plunged into the regular series of readings for his own benefit, the reception he received from Manchester should be absolutely overwhelming. This was in September, 1858, of which occasion Forster says: "The reception that awaited him at Manchester had very special warmth in it, occasioned by an adverse tone taken in the comment of one of the Manchester daily papers on the letter which by a breach of confidence had been then recently printed. 'My violated letter' Dickens always called it."

When I came to Manchester on Saturday I found seven hundred stalls taken! When I went into the room at night 2500 people had paid, and more were being turned away from every door. The welcome they gave me was astounding in its affectionate recognition of the late trouble, and fairly for once unmanned me. I never saw such a sight or heard such a sound. When they had thoroughly done it, they settled down to enjoy themselves and certainly did enjoy themselves most heartily to the last minute.

On Saturdays October the 16th and 23rd, 1858, the readings were repeated with equal success.

On December 3rd, in the same year, Dickens was again in Manchester, presiding at the annual meeting of the Institutional Association of Lancashire and Cheshire at the Free Trade Hall, and presented prizes to candidates from over one hundred Mechanics' Institutes affiliated to the Association.

It was nearly three years before Dickens again appeared publicly in the city. This was on Saturday, December 14th, 1861, when he read at Free Trade Hall. He described his reception as "magnificent," adding:

When I went in (there was a very fine hall) they applauded in the most tremendous manner and the extent to which they were taken aback and taken by storm by *Copperfield* was really a fine thing to see.

In the January following two readings were given on the 25th.

There was an interval of over four years before Dickens again read in Manchester. This was on April 12th, 1866, when he had, as he himself said "such a prodigious demonstration . . . that I was obliged (contrary to my principles in such cases) to go back." Forster informs us:

"The success everywhere went far beyond even the former successes. A single night at Manchester, when eight hundred stalls were let, two thousand five hundred and sixty-five people admitted, and the receipts amounted to more than three hundred pounds, was followed in nearly the same proportion by all the greater towns."

"The reception at Manchester last night" he wrote to Miss Hogarth, of this occasion, "was quite a magnificent sight; the whole of the immense audience standing up and cheering."

The return visit was on April 26th.

In 1867 there were two readings in the February: the first on the 2nd of the month, and the second on the 16th, of which occasion he wrote to his daughter from Glasgow:

Manchester last night was a splendid spectacle. They cheered to that extent after it was over that I was obliged to huddle on my clothes (for I was undressing to prepare for the journey) and go back again. After so heavy a week, it was rather stiff to start on this long journey at a quarter to two in the morning; but I got more sleep than I ever got in a railway carriage before. . . . I have, as I had in the last series of readings, a curious feeling of soreness all round the body—which I suppose to arise from the great exertion of voice.

In 1868 Dickens gave two special Saturday evening readings at the Free Trade Hall, on April 12th and 26th. During his autumn reading tour of that year, the Saturday readings at Manchester were quite a feature, October 10th, 17th, 24th and 31st, being reserved for them at the Free Trade Hall.

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In March the year following readings were given on Saturdays and Mondays the 6th, 8th, 20th and 22nd. These were Dickens's farewell readings in Manchester.

From the Queen's Hotel he wrote on March 7th, 1869 :

We have had our sitting room chimney afire this morning and have had to turn out elsewhere to breakfast. We are very comfortably housed here, and certainly that immense hall is a wonderful place for its size.

Dickens's health at this time gave cause for some alarm, but Dolby, his manager, tells us that they "passed an enjoyable and quiet Sunday"—after the reading the night before—"at the Queen's Hotel, and as by a wonderful circumstance it did not rain, we drove to Alderley Edge, the fresh air reviving the chief wonderfully."

The final breakdown occurred at Preston only a few weeks later (see page 252) and the reading tours had to be abandoned: and although a few final readings were given early in the following year, March 22nd, 1869, was Dickens's last appearance in Manchester.

IV

The second most important town of the *Hard Times* country is Preston. Early in the year 1854, whilst engaged on the story, desiring to get first-hand knowledge of the conditions of a town during a strike, Dickens made a special journey to Preston, and in addition to matter for the novel, he wrote an article for *Household Words*, entitled "On Strike." He was a little disappointed at the lack of local colour he was able to obtain from this visit, for he wrote to Forster:

I am afraid I shall not be able to get much here. Except the crowds at the street-corners reading the placards pro and con; and the cold absence of smoke from the mill-chimneys; there is very little in the streets to make the town remarkable. I am told that the people "sit at home and mope." The delegates with the money from the neighbouring places come in to-day to report the amounts they bring; and to-morrow the people are paid. When I have seen both these ceremonies, I shall return. It is a nasty place (I thought it was a model town); and I am in the Bull Hotel, before which some time ago the people assembled supposing the masters to be here, and on demanding to have them out were remonstrated with by the landlady in

person. I saw the account in an Italian paper, in which it was stated that "the populace then environed the Palazzo Bull, until the padrona of the Palazzo heroically appeared at one of the upper windows and addressed them!" One can hardly conceive anything less likely to be represented to an Italian mind by this description, than the old, grubby, smoky, mean, intensely formal red brick house with a narrow gateway and a dingy yard, to which it applies. At the theatre last night I saw Hamlet, and should have done better to "sit at home and mope" like the idle workmen.

Wills, the assistant Editor of *Household Words* was his companion on this occasion for on his next reported visit for the reading in December 1861, we find him writing to Wills from the Victoria Hotel, Preston, on Friday, December 13th, 1861, as follows:

Both Carlisle and Lancaster came out admirably, though I doubted both, as you d d. But, unlike you, I always doubted this place; I do so still. It is a poor place at the best (you remember?) and the mills are working half time and trade is very bad.

The young lady who sells the papers at the station is just the same as ever. Has orders for to-night, and is coming "with a person." "The person" said I. "Never *you* mind" said she.

The reading was given in the Corn Exchange, now the Public Hall.

In the spring of 1867 Dickens read again at Preston (this time at the Theatre Royal, on April 25th), and Dolby tells us that they walked on foot the twelve miles between Preston and Blackburn, the place fixed for the next reading. On the way they passed the picturesque ruins of an old mansion called Hoghton Towers, which they inspected and which so interested Dickens that he made it the scene of the story which he had undertaken to write specially for America, "George Silverman's Explanation."

George Silverman was described as a native of Preston:

My parents were in a miserable condition in life, and my infant home was a cellar in Preston. I recollect the sound of father's Lancashire clogs on the street pavement above, as being different in my young hearing from the sound of all other clogs; and I recollect that, when mother came down the cellar-steps, I used tremblingly

to speculate on her feet having a good or an ill tempered look,—on her knees,—on her waist,—until finally her face came into view, and settled the question. From this it will be seen that I was timid, and that the cellar steps were steep, and that the doorway was very low.

The story centres around Hoghton Towers, to which he is taken in a cart.

I found that we were mounting a steep hill, where the road was a rutty by-road through a field. And so, by fragments of an ancient terrace, and by some rugged out-buildings that had once been fortified, and passing under a ruined gateway we came to the old farm-house in the thick stone wall outside the old quadrangle of Hoghton Towers; which I looked at like a stupid savage, seeing no speciality in, seeing no antiquity in; assuming all farm-houses to resemble it.

The impression obtained on that short visit was a very vivid one, as the following description shows: the reference to James I is the story attaching to the Towers, that here that Monarch knighted the loin of beef ("Sirloin")!

What do I know now of Hoghton Towers? Very little; for I have been gratefully unwilling to disturb my first impressions. A house, centuries old, on high ground a mile or so removed from the road between Preston and Blackburn, where the first James of England, in his hurry to make money by making baronets, perhaps made some of those remunerative dignitaries. A house, centuries old, deserted and falling to pieces, its woods and gardens long since grass land or ploughed up, the Rivers Ribble and Darwen glancing below it, and a vague haze of smoke, against which not even the supernatural prescience of the first Stuart could foresee a counter-blast, hinting at steam-power, powerful in two distances.

What did I know then of Hoghton Towers? When I first peeped in at the gate of the lifeless quadrangle, and started from the mouldering statue becoming visible to me like its guardian ghost; when I stole round by the back of the farm-house, and got in among the ancient rooms, many of them with their floors and ceilings falling, the beams and rafters hanging dangerously down, the plaster dropping as I trod, the oaken panels stripped away, the windows half walled up, half broken; when I discovered a gallery commanding the old kitchen, and looked down

between balustrades upon a massive old table and benches, fearing to see I know not what dead-alive creatures come in and seat themselves, and look up with I know not what dreadful eyes, or lack of eyes, at me; when all over the house I was awed by gaps and chinks where the sky stared sorrowfully at me, where the birds passed, and the ivy rustled, and the stains of winter weather blotched the rotten floors, when down at the bottom of dark pits of staircase, into which the stairs had sunk, green leaves trembled, butterflies fluttered, and bees hummed in and out through the broken doorways; when encircling the whole ruin were sweet scents, and sights of fresh green growth, and ever-renewing life, that I had never dreamed of,—I say, when I passed into such clouded perception of these things as my dark soul could compass, what did I know then of Hoghton Towers?

As an example of how environment had so strong an influence on Dickens, it must be added that after the story had been published he wrote to Wills, “it is very curious that I did not in the least see how to begin his state of mind until I walked into Hoghton Towers one bright April day.”

It was at Preston in April 1869 that the reading tour came to an abrupt conclusion. Dickens had had a very bad attack at Chester the week before and from there had written to his Doctor, Mr. Carr Beard. The readings that week had been gone through with difficulty, but a week-end at Blackpool had revived Dickens’s spirits and health very considerably.

“I telegraphed to the Imperial Hotel for apartments” says Dolby, “which, on our arrival there, we found most comfortable and the fresh breeze blowing from the sea was most invigorating and beneficial to Mr. Dickens, who revived in a wonderful manner.”

Dolby was hoping that the rest would enable Dickens to get comfortably through the two remaining readings of the week, Preston and Warrington, but such was not to be, for at Preston the rest of the reading tour was cancelled on doctors’ advice, and Dickens returned to Gad’s Hill.

From the Imperial Hotel at Blackpool Dickens wrote the following letter to Miss Hogarth in regard to his health:

I have come to this Sea Beach Hotel (charming) for a day’s rest. I am much better than I was on Sunday; but shall want careful looking to, to get through the readings. My weakness and deadness are all on the left side; and if

I don't look at anything I try to touch with my left hand, I don't know where it is. I am in (secret) consultation with Frank Beard, who says that I have given him indisputable evidences of overwork which he could wish to treat immediately; and so I have telegraphed for him. I have had a delicious walk by the sea to-day, and I sleep soundly, and have picked up amazingly in appetite. My foot is greatly better too, and I wear my own boot.

and from Preston he wrote to Forster on the afternoon of the day fixed for the reading:

Don't say anything about it, but the tremendously severe nature of this work is a little shaking me. At Chester last Sunday I found myself extremely giddy, and extremely uncertain of my sense of touch, both in the left leg and the left hand and arms. I had been taking some slight medicine of Beard's; and immediately wrote to him describing exactly what I felt, and asking him whether those feelings could be referable to the medicine? He promptly replied: "There can be no mistaking them from your exact account. The medicine cannot possibly have caused them. I recognise indisputable symptoms of overwork, and I wish to take you in hand without any loss of time." They have greatly modified since, but he is coming down here this afternoon. To-morrow night at Warrington, I shall have but twenty-five more nights to work through. If he can coach me up for them, I do not doubt that I shall get all right again—as I did when I became free in America. The foot has given me very little trouble. Yet it is remarkable that it is the left foot too; and that I told Henry Thompson (before I saw his old master Syme) that I had an inward conviction that whatever it was, it was not gout. I also told Beard, a year after the Staplehurst accident, that I was certain that my heart had been fluttered, and wanted a little helping. This the stethoscope confirmed; and considering the immense exertion I am undergoing, and the constant jarring of express trains, the case seems to me quite intelligible. Don't say anything in the Gad's direction about my being a little out of sorts. I have broached the matter of course; but very lightly. Indeed there is no reason for broaching it otherwise.

The evening of April 22nd had been fixed for a reading at the Guildhall, Preston, and Dolby came back to the Bull Hotel, where they were staying, with the good news that every ticket had been sold and that the proceeds were nearly

£200. Dolby was much concerned to find Dickens in possession of a telegram from Mr. Beard to say that arising from Dickens's letters to him from Blackpool he had decided to come to Preston at once. It was nearly five o'clock before the Doctor arrived, and an examination caused Mr. Beard to tell Dolby, "If you insist on Dickens taking the platform to-night, I will not guarantee but that he goes through life dragging a foot after him."

Dickens begged the Doctor to let him try it for that one night; the tickets having all been sold, the people would be very disappointed, he explained, and Dolby be put to such an amount of inconvenience. But the Doctor prevailed, and the meeting was cancelled, Dickens going to the Adelphi Hotel at Liverpool with the Doctor. Dolby tells us of the difficulties he had to square up things in the town, less than two hours being at his disposal before the advertised time of opening.

"It became a matter of serious consideration with me, how to prevent persons living at a distance from coming to the Guildhall and being disappointed; and, if they should all come, how to get sufficient money in sovereigns, half-sovereigns, half-crowns and shillings to return to them in exchange for their tickets."

At that time the banks were, of course, closed, but the landlord of the Bull collected all the available cash from his till, and the customers in the commercial room; and in due course the Mayor and Dolby attended behind a green baize table in the entrance hall of the Guildhall, ready to pay out, but to their surprise "the total amount of money returned did not exceed £20, and instead of the anticipated confusion and grumbling, nothing was heard but words expressive of deep sympathy for Mr. Dickens in his illness."

The smoothness with which the difficulties were overcome was due to the resources of Dolby and the official help he had received. The landlord of the Bull had formerly been stationmaster at Preston, and he telegraphed to all stations within a twenty miles radius that the reading had been cancelled; similarly the Mayor assisted in sending out mounted police to all the roads leading into the town, stopping all incoming carriages and informing the occupants of what had happened.

April 26th, 1867, when he saw Hoghton Tower for the first time. On this occasion he read in the Town Hall Assembly Room.

The next visit was almost two years later, Wednesday, April 19th, 1869, when he read at the Exchange Assembly Room, now a cinema. It was announced as "The last Mr. Dickens will ever give in Blackburn." It was almost his last provincial reading, and he was apparently in a bad state of health, to judge from a letter written to Mrs. Watson, from Blackburn the day after the reading :

I don't wonder at the papers being confused regarding my whereabouts, when I am confused myself. I am in a different place every day . . . I shall be gone from here before noon to-morrow: I shall be gone from there (I forget where "there" is) before noon next day. Nothing would uphold me through such work but the prospect of soon working it out.

Bolton has a melancholy interest, in the fact that the last provincial reading took place at the Temperance Hall there on Tuesday, April 20th, 1869. The day following Dickens went to Blackpool to get refreshed by the sea air. A reading at Southport was actually contemplated on that day, but was cancelled so as to allow the remaining two readings of the week, at Preston and Warrington, to be carried out. The reading at Preston on the Thursday was abandoned at the last hour as we have already shown.

Warrington, where the reading on Friday, April 23rd, 1869 was cancelled after the breakdown the day previously, was visited on May 2nd, 1867 for a reading at the Public Hall, on the site of which the Royal Court Theatre now stands. This reading ended the 1867 tour.

VI

There was no town in England, outside London itself, that was more often visited by Dickens, and a favourite with him too, than Liverpool.

In the *Life of Dickens*, Forster tells us, under date of 1838, how he joined Dickens in Liverpool during the latter's visit to North Wales with Phiz, on the occasion of which we have had something to say in Chapter Seven. This was

probably the novelist's first visit to Liverpool. "Between the completion of *Oliver* and its publication, Dickens went to see something of North Wales; and joining him at Liverpool, I returned with him," writes Forster, to whom Dickens had written from Llangollen on November 3rd, 1838: "Go straight to Liverpool by the first Birmingham train on Monday morning, and at the Adelphi Hotel in that town you will find me."

It was from Liverpool that Dickens and his wife set sail in the *Britannia* for the United States on January 4th, 1842. On this occasion he again stayed at the Adelphi Hotel, to which he was faithful on all his subsequent visits. In *American Notes* he tells us:

I have not inquired among my medical acquaintance, whether Turtle, and cold Punch, with Hock, Champagne, and Claret, and all the *sight et cetera* usually included in an unlimited order for a good dinner—especially when it is left to the liberal construction of my faultless friend, Mr. Radley, of the Adelphi Hotel—are peculiarly calculated to suffer a sea-change; or whether a plain mutton-chop, and a glass or two of sherry, would be less likely of conversion into foreign and disconcerting material. My own opinion is, that whether one is discreet or indiscreet in these particulars, on the eve of a sea-voyage, is a matter of little consequence; and that, to use a common phrase, "it comes to very much the same thing in the end." Be this as it may, I know that the dinner of that day was undeniably perfect; that it comprehended all these items, and a great many more; and that we all did ample justice to it. And I know, too, that, bating a certain tacit avoidance of any allusion to to-morrow; such as may be supposed to prevail between delicate-minded turnkeys, and a sensitive prisoner who is to be hanged next morning; we got on very well, and, all things considered, were merry enough.

A new Adelphi Hotel now rears its stately head on the site of the hotel kept by James Radley to which Dickens was so very partial. Dolby, in "Charles Dickens as I Knew Him" has something interesting to say respecting Dickens's fondness for this hotel. He is referring to a reading at the neighbouring city of Manchester:

"After the reading on the 12th, we returned the same night to Liverpool, as amongst the hotels in the large towns in England none was such a favourite with Mr. Dickens as the Adelphi at Liverpool—then kept by the late Mr. James

Radley (son of a worthy sire, also dead), the man who by geniality and good management obtained for the hotel a popularity which, despite the fact (a most unusual circumstance as regards hotels) that it is managed under the provisions of the Joint Stock Act, it still retains. Railway accommodation, too, being so good between the two towns, it is not to be wondered at that Mr. Dickens should prefer to return to this his favourite hotel, and, except London, his favourite city—or perhaps as it was not a 'city' then, I had better say 'urban retreat'—rather than spend the night in the gloomy atmosphere of Manchester.

"When we arrived in Liverpool from Manchester, an excellent supper awaited us—a pleasant finish to a day of hard work and excitement. Mr. Dickens brewed a bowl of punch, an accomplishment in which he stood pre-eminent, as in all matters to which he put his hand. And here, as in all probability the recurring mention of such luxuries as these may lead to misapprehension as to Mr. Dickens's character as an epicure, I must take the opportunity of stating that, although he so frequently both wrote and talked about eating and drinking, I have seldom met with a man who partook less freely of the kindly fare placed before him. In this observation I am not singular, as the following quotation from a letter written by a common friend, Mr. James T. Fields, of Boston (U.S.), will testify: 'He liked to dilate in imagination over the brewing of a bowl of punch, but I always noticed that when the punch was ready he drank less of it than any one who might be present. It was the sentiment of the thing, and not the thing itself, that engaged his attention.' To the consideration of those who, from want of appreciation of a good man's heart, deprecate the frequent allusions in his writings to the good things of this life, I would seriously and earnestly commend this quotation."

In September 1843, Dickens accompanied by Forster and Maclise were at Liverpool to see Macready off to America—and later wrote promising to be the first to welcome him at the same port on his return to English soil. But Dickens's first public appearance in the City was not until February 26th in the following year, when he presided at a soiree given by the Liverpool Mechanics' Institution (now the Liverpool Institute).

Forster quotes an interesting letter in this respect because, as he says, "it shows thus early the sensitive regard to his position as a man of letters, and his scrupulous considera-

tion for the feelings as well as interest of the class, which he manifested in many various and often greatly self-sacrificing ways all through his life."

Advise me on the following point. This Liverpool Institution, which is wealthy and has a high grammar-school, writes me yesterday by its secretary a business letter about the order of the proceedings on Monday; and it begins thus. "I beg to send you prefixed, with the best respects of our committee, a bank order for twenty pounds in payment of the expenses contingent on your visit to Liverpool."—And there, sure enough, it is. Now my impulse was, *and is*, decidedly to return it. Twenty pounds is not of moment to me; and any sacrifice of independence is worth it twenty times' twenty times told. But haggling in my mind is a doubt whether that would be proper, and not boastful (in an inexplicable way); and whether as an author, I have a right to put myself on a basis which the professors of literature in other forms connected with the Institution cannot afford to occupy. Don't you see? But of course you do. The case stands thus. The Manchester Institution, being in debt, appeals to me as it were in formâ pauperis, and makes no such provision as I have named. The Birmingham Institution, just struggling into life with great difficulty, applies to me on the same grounds. But the Leeds people (thriving) write to me, making the expenses a distinct matter of business; and the Liverpool, as a point of delicacy, say nothing about it to the last minute, and then send the money. Now, what in the name of goodness ought I to do?

"My opinion," adds Forster, "was clearly for sending the money back, which accordingly was done."

Although he had "misgivings of over gentility" on the part of Liverpool, he was delighted with his reception. An interesting and typical letter was written at the time to Mrs. Dickens:

LIVERPOOL, RADLEY'S HOTEL,
Monday, Feb. 26th, 1844.

MY DEAR KATE,

I got down here last night (after a most intolerably wet journey) before seven, and found Thompson sitting by my fire. He had ordered dinner, and we ate it pleasantly enough, and went to bed in good time. This morning, Mr. Yates, the great man connected with the Institution (and a brother of Ashton Yates's) called. I

went to look at it with him. It is an enormous place, and the tickets have been selling at two and even three guineas apiece. The lecture-room, in which the celebration is held, will accommodate over thirteen hundred people. It was being fitted with gas after the manner of the ring at Astley's. I should think it an easy place to speak in, being a semi-circle with seats rising one above another to the ceiling, and will have eight hundred ladies to-night, in full dress. I am rather shaky just now, but shall pull up, I have no doubt. At dinner-time to-morrow you will receive, I hope, a facetious document hastily penned after I return to-night, telling you how it all went off.

The promised "facetious document" was duly enclosed and read as follows:

OUT OF THE COMMON—PLEASE

Dickens *against* The World

Charles Dickens, of No. 1, Devonshire Terrace, York Gate, Regent's Park, in the county of Middlesex, gentleman, the successful plaintiff in the above cause, maketh oath and saith: That on the day and date hereof, to wit at seven o'clock in the evening, he, this deponent, took the chair at a large assembly of the Mechanics' Institution at Liverpool, and that having been received with tremendous and enthusiastic plaudits, he, this deponent, did immediately dash into a vigorous, brilliant, humorous, pathetic, eloquent, fervid, and impassioned speech. That the said speech was enlivened by thirteen hundred persons, with frequent, vehement, uproarious, and defeaning cheers, and to the best of this deponent's knowledge and belief, he, this deponent, did speak up like a man, and did, to the best of his knowledge and belief, considerably distinguish himself. That after the proceedings of the opening were over, and a vote of thanks was proposed to this deponent, he, this deponent, did again distinguish himself, and that the cheering at that time, accompanied with clapping of hands and stamping of feet, was in this deponent's case thundering and awful. And this deponent further saith, that his white-and-black or magpie waist-coat, did create a strong sensation, and that during the hours of promenading, this deponent heard from persons surrounding him such exclamations as, "What is it! Is

it a waistcoat? No, it's a shirt"—and the like—all of which this deponent believes to have been complimentary and gratifying; but this deponent further saith that he is now going to supper, and wishes he may have an appetite to eat it.

CHARLES DICKENS.

Sworn before me at the Adelphi
Hotel, Liverpool, on February
26th, 1844.

S. RADLEY.

The letter further tells how he met here his sister Fanny, lately married to Mr. Burnet of Manchester, and went with her to visit Captain Hewett and the s.s. *Britannia* which had taken them to America two years before.

When I came back here, I found Fanny and Hewett had picked me up just before. We all went off straight to the *Britannia*, which lay where she did when we went on board. We went into the old little cabin and the ladies' cabin, but Mrs. Beaumont had gone to Scotland, as the ship does not sail again before May. In the saloon we had some champagne and biscuits, and Hewett had set out upon the table a block of Boston ice, weighing fifty pounds.

On Wednesday, July 28th, 1847, he appeared in "Every Man in his Humour" with his illustrious company of amateur actors at the Theatre Royal for the benefit of the fund being raised for Leigh Hunt; and the following year, on June 5th, the company performed at the Amphitheatre for the benefit of the fund for the endowment of a perpetual curatorship at Shakespeare's house at Stratford-on-Avon.

It was some four years later before he again appeared as an actor in Liverpool. This time it was in aid of the funds of the Guild of Literature and Art, on February 13th and 14th, 1852, at the Philharmonic Hall. These performances concluded the little tour. To Lytton, who had been with him at the Manchester performance a night or two before, Dickens wrote from London the day after:

At Liverpool I had a Round Robin on the stage after the play was over, a place being left for your signature, and as I am going to have it framed, I'll tell Green to send it to Lincoln's-Inn-Fields. You have no idea how good Tenniel, Topham and Collins have been in what they had to do.

I left Liverpool at four o'clock this morning and am so blinded by excitement, gas and waving hats and handkerchiefs, that I can hardly see to write, but I cannot go to bed without telling you what a triumph we have had. Allowing for the necessarily heavy expenses of all kinds, I believe we can hardly fund less than a thousand pounds out of this trip alone. . . . At Liverpool the reception was . . . enthusiastic. We played two nights running. to a hall crowded to the roof—more like an opera at Genoa or Milan than anything else I can compare it to. We dined at the Town Hall magnificently, and it made no difference in the response. I said what we were quietly determined to do (when the Guild was given as the toast of the night) and really they were so noble and generous in their encouragement.

A further performance in aid of the same object was given later in the year, on Friday, September 3rd, also at the Philharmonic Hall.

On August 18th, 1858, Dickens first appeared in Liverpool as a reader of his own books. This was also at the Philharmonic Hall. He had an audience of two thousand three hundred. "They turned away hundreds," wrote Dickens of his assistants, "sold all the books, rolled on the ground in my room knee deep in checks, and made a perfect pantomime of the whole thing."

The readings were repeated on October 19th, 20th and 21st; and on October 15th two further readings were given.

His next visit was in January, 1862, for three nights 27th, 28th and 29th at the St. George's Hall. To his sister-in-law he wrote on January 28th from the Adelphi Hotel:

The beautiful room was crammed to excess last night, and numbers were turned away. Its beauty and completeness when it is lighted up are most brilliant to behold, and for a reading it is simply perfect.

To Forster he wrote in the same strain:

The beautiful St. George's Hall crowded to excess last night and numbers turned away. Brilliant to see when lighted up, and for a reading simply perfect. You remember that a Liverpool audience is usually dull; but they put me on my mettle last night, for I never saw such an audience—no, not even in Edinburgh! The agents (alone, and of course without any reference to ready money at the doors) had taken for the two readings two hundred pounds.

In the letter to Miss Hogarth, he speaks of sleeping badly, and of having "been over to Birkenhead for a little change of air to-day," his head being "dazed and worn by gas and heat."

In April, 1866, he was again at Liverpool for a series of five readings (April 11th, 13th, 14th, 27th, 28th), and wrote on the 13th:

This is the first very fine day we have had. I have taken advantage of it by crossing to Birkenhead and getting some air upon the water. It was fresh and beautiful.

and reported that the Hall in Liverpool (St. George's Hall) being his especial favourite, and extraordinarily easy to read in, "is *almost* a rest."

The next day he wrote to his daughter:

The police reported officially that three thousand people were turned away from the hall last night . . . They were a very fine audience, and took enthusiastically every point in Copperfield and the Trial . . . One man advertised in the morning paper that he would give thirty shillings (double) for three stalls, but nobody would sell, and he didn't get in.

Except that I can *not* sleep, I really think myself in very much better training than I had anticipated. A dozen oysters and a little champagne between the parts every night, seem to constitute the best restorative I have ever yet tried.

In 1867 he was in Liverpool on two separate occasions, the first on January 18th and 19th. At this time he was already feeling the great strain these readings and the long travelling had upon him for we find him writing to Forster, from Liverpool on January 21st:

The enthusiasm has been unbounded. On Friday night I quite astonished myself; but I was taken so faint afterwards that they laid me on a sofa at the hall for half an hour. I attribute it to my distressing inability to sleep at night, and to nothing worse. Everything is made as easy to me as it possibly can be. Dolby would do anything to lighten the work, and *does* everything.

To his sister-in-law he added the information: "The readings have produced such an immense effect here that we are coming back for two more in February."

There was very severe weather at that time, which affected the sale of tickets in the better parts of the hall, "it being next to impossible for people to come out at night with horses," and his letter further speaks of the delay in the Atlantic mail-boats causing great anxiety. The weather did not deter him from his accustomed walks. "We have been out for four hours in the bitter east wind, and walking on the sea shore, where there is a broad strip of great blocks of ice."

On February 15th he again wrote to his sister-in-law of his previous night's reading at Liverpool:

'We had an enormous turn-away last night, and do not doubt about having a cram to-night. The day has been very fine, and I have turned it to the wholesomest account by walking on the sands at New Brighton all the morning. I am not quite right within, but believe it to be an effect of the railway shaking. There is no doubt of the fact that, after the Staplehurst experience, it tells more and more (railway shaking, that is) instead of, as one might have expected, less and less. The charming room here greatly lessens the fatigue of this fatiguing week. I read last night with no more exertion than if I had been at Gad's and yet to eleven hundred people and with astonishing effect.

Early in August, 1867, Dickens was in Liverpool seeing his manager, Dolby, off to America, to report upon the prospects of a reading tour there, which being very favourable, Dickens left Liverpool on November 9th in s.s. *Cuba* for his second visit to the United States.

On his return to England in 1868, Dickens gave further readings in the St. George's Hall on October 12th, 13th, 14th, 26th, 27th and 28th, and six months later gave his final readings in Liverpool. These were four in number, and were given on April 5th, 6th, 8th and 9th, 1869, at the Theatre Royal. On the conclusion, at the invitation of the Mayor, Dickens was entertained at a public banquet in the St. George's Hall on April 10th, when Lord Dufferin presided, and in the course of his reply to the toast of his health, Dickens said:

"It is no homage to Liverpool based upon a moment's untrustworthy enthusiasm, but it is the solid fact, built upon the rock of experience, that when I first made up my mind, after considerable deliberation, systematically to meet my readers in large numbers, face to face, to try to express myself to them through the breath of life, Liverpool

stood foremost among the great places out of London to which I had looked with eager confidence and pleasure. And why was this? Not merely because of the reputation of its citizens for generous estimation of the arts; not merely because I had unworthily filled the chair of its great self-educational institution long ago; not merely because the place had been a home to me since the well-remembered day when its blessed roofs and steeples dipped into the Mersey behind me on the occasion of my first sailing away to see my generous friends across the Atlantic twenty-seven years ago. Not for one of those considerations, but because it had been my happiness to have a public opportunity of testing the spirit of its people. I had asked Liverpool for help towards the worthy preservation of Shakespeare's house. Or another occasion I had ventured to address Liverpool in the names of Leigh Hunt and Sheridan Knowles. On still another occasion I had addressed it in the cause of brotherhood and sisterhood of letters and the kindred arts, and on each and on all the response had been unsurpassable, spontaneous, open-handed, and munificent."

Dolby tells us that after this speech "Mr. Dickens walked to the station, and the good feeling of the people of Liverpool showed itself heartily in the street; for during his progress to the station he was repeatedly stopped by persons of the working classes wanting to shake hands with him, and all of them eager to thank him for the pleasure his books had afforded them. This, however, was not a new experience to him in the large manufacturing towns."

Although Liverpool saw a great deal of Dickens and it played an important part in his life; yet there is only a bare mention of the city in several of his writings, and then mostly as the port of embarkation for the New World. Thus, even before he made the passage of the Atlantic himself he caused Mr. Vincent Crummles to set off from Liverpool to America, and at a later date made Martin Chuzzlewit to follow his example. In neither case is there more than a passing reference to Liverpool; but when Martin and Mark returned to England by the *Screw*, we have a cheerful picture of the scene on their arrival.

It was mid-day, and high water in the English port for which the *Screw* was bound, when, borne in gallantly upon the fulness of the tide, she let go her anchor in the river.

Bright as the scene was; fresh, and full of motion; airy, free, and sparkling; it was nothing to the life and exultation in the breasts of the two travellers, at sight of the old churches, roofs, and darkened chimney stacks of Home.

About the "cheap tavern" at which they regaled themselves upon "a smoking steak and certain flowing mugs of beer as only men just landed from the sea can revel in the generous dainties of the earth," Dickens had some very characteristic description, and we have no doubt some such a tavern still exists to-day, in the streets about the docks.

It was one of those unaccountable little rooms which are never seen anywhere but in a tavern, and are supposed to have got into taverns by reason of the facilities afforded to the architect for getting drunk while engaged in their construction. It had more corners in it than the brain of an obstinate man; was full of mad closets, into which nothing could be put that was not specially invented and made for that purpose; had mysterious shelfings and bulk-heads, and indications of staircases in the ceiling; and was elaborately provided with a bell that rung in the room itself, about two feet from the handle, and had no connexion whatever with any other part of the establishment. It was a little below the pavement, and abutted close upon it; so that passengers grated against the window-panes with their buttons, and scraped it with their baskets; and fearful boys suddenly coming between a thoughtful guest and the light, derided him, or put out their tongues as if he were a physician; or made white knobs on the ends of their noses by flattening the same against the glass, and vanished awfully, like spectres.

CHAPTER TWELVE

A PICKWICK PILGRIMAGE TO THE COPPERFIELD COUNTRY

I

ALTHOUGH the county of Kent held the earliest affections of Dickens through his boyhood days at Rochester and Chatham, as we have shown in Chapter One, Essex and Suffolk and the East of England generally have a special claim, as some of his earliest experiences of English travelling were gained from his visits to East Anglia during the Elections of 1834. The first of all the letters published in *The Letters of Charles Dickens*, is to Henry Austin, a friend of his boyhood, who afterwards married Dickens's sister Letitia. It is undated, but was doubtless written in 1833 or 1834, during which time Dickens was a reporter for the "Morning Chronicle"; the trip he was "ordered" was on behalf of that paper.

FURNIVAL'S INN,
Wednesday night, past 12.

DEAR HENRY,

I have just been ordered on a journey, the length of which is at present uncertain. I may be back on Sunday very probably, and start again on the following day. Should this be the case, you shall hear from me before.

Don't laugh. I am going (alone) in a gig: and, to quote the eloquent inducements which the proprietors of Hampstead *shays* hold out to Sunday riders—"the gen'l'm'n drives himself." I am going into Essex and Suffolk. It strikes me I shall be spilt before I pay a turnpike. I have a presentiment I shall run over an only child before I reach Chelmsford, my first stage.

Let the evident haste of this specimen of "The Polite Letter Writer" be its excuse, and

Believe me, dear Henry,
Most sincerely yours,
CHARLES DICKENS.

Thus it came about that the second pilgrimage of the Pickwickians was through Essex into Suffolk, for whatever may be the true identity of the town of Eatanswill, Mr. Pickwick travelled by the Norwich coach and from Eatanswill took another coach to Bury St. Edmunds.

The journey to Ipswich was made at a subsequent date from the Bull Inn, Whitechapel, when Tony Weller himself was the coachman and the best account of the road is given in that chapter of *The Pickwick Papers* dealing with the journey; but unfortunately after leaving the Whitechapel district, details are lacking of the road through which they passed.

According to "Cary's Itinerary," the Norwich coaches which started from the Bull in Whitechapel went via Sudbury, and that is one of the best reasons for supposing Sudbury, rather than Ipswich, to have stood for Eatanswill.

In later years David Copperfield was made to traverse this very same road, as the first portion of his journey to and from Yarmouth.

The composite route we propose taking is via Chigwell to Chelmsford, Sudbury, Bury St. Edmunds, Ipswich, Norwich and Yarmouth.

Although Chigwell is only a dozen miles from London, it has far escaped the ruthless hand of the builder, and presents all the rural charms of a village in the heart of the country.

The sole claim of Chigwell to Dickensian interest rests in its connection with *Barnaby Rudge*: but what a claim that is!

It is doubtful if Dickens has endeared us more to any of the Inns which he described, than he has to the Maypole at Chigwell; how alluring is his description at the very outset of the story of the "house of public entertainment called the Maypole" that, "in the year 1775 . . . stood upon the borders of Epping Forest, at a distance of about twelve miles from London," with its "emblem reared on the roadside over against the house": how attractive are the characters that we first meet round the blazing fire; old John Willet the landlord with his staring, stolid face; little Solomon Daisy "the parish clerk and bell-ringer of Chigwell: a village hard by" and the teller of "the famous Maypole story"; "short Tom Cobb the general chandler," and "long Phil Parkes, the ranger."

But first, the description of the Maypole itself:

The Maypole was an old building, with more gable ends than a lazy man would care to count on a sunny day; huge zig-zag chimneys, out of which it seemed as though even smoke could not choose but come in more than naturally

fantastic shapes, imparted to it in its tortuous progress; and vast stables, gloomy, ruinous, and empty. The place was said to have been built in the days of King Henry the Eighth; and there was a legend, not only that Queen Elizabeth had slept there one night while upon a hunting excursion, to wit, in a certain oak-panelled room with a deep bay window, but that next morning, while standing on a mounting block before the door with one foot in the stirrup, the virgin monarch had then and there boxed and cuffed an unlucky page for some neglect of duty. . . .

Whether these, and many other stories of the like nature, were true or untrue, the Maypole was really an old house, a very old house, perhaps as old as it claimed to be, and perhaps older, which will sometimes happen with houses of an uncertain, as with ladies of a certain age. Its windows were old diamond-pane lattices, its floors were sunken and uneven, its ceilings blackened by the hand of time, and heavy with massive beams. Over the doorway was an ancient porch, quaintly and grotesquely carved, and here on summer evenings the more favoured customers smoked and drank—ay, and sang many a good song too, sometimes—reposing on two grim-looking high-backed settles, which, like the twin dragons of some fairy tale, guarded the entrance to the mansion.

In the chimneys of the disused rooms, swallows had built their nests for many a long year, and from earliest spring to latest autumn whole colonies of sparrows chirped and twittered in the eaves. There were more pigeons about the dreary stable yard and out-buildings than anybody but the landlord could reckon up. . . . With its overhanging stories, drowsy little panes of glass, and front bulging out and projecting over the pathway, the old house looked as if it were nodding in its sleep. Indeed, it needed no very great stretch of fancy to detect in it other resemblances to humanity. The bricks of which it was built had originally been a deep dark red, but had grown yellow and discoloured like an old man's skin; the sturdy timbers had decayed like teeth; and here and there the ivy, like a warm garment to comfort it in its age, wrapt its green leaves closely round the time-worn walls.

The whole story of *Barnaby Rudge* centres round the Maypole, and Dickens describes it fully both inside and out, with a little exaggeration at times that is the writer's license. It is somewhat remarkable therefore that Dickens should

have chosen to give it a fictitious name, for there is no Maypole at Chigwell, the only inn there being the King's Head, the name it has borne for over a couple of centuries. There is, however, at Chigwell Row, which is referred to by Solomon Daisy in his story, as being a mile and a half away, a Maypole Inn whose name may possibly have suggested itself to Dickens as a more suitable one for his story.

Dickens must have been very familiar with Chigwell long before *Barnaby Rudge* was written. After its publication we find him writing to Forster on March 25th, 1841, appointing the place for a pleasant gathering:

Chigwell, my dear fellow, is the greatest place in the world. Name your day for going. Such a delicious old Inn, opposite the Church-yard—such a lovely ride—such beautiful forest scenery—such an out of the way, rural, place—such a sexton! I say again name your day.

In quoting this letter Forster adds a note which completes the identity of the “delicious old inn opposite the church-yard” with the Maypole of *Barnaby Rudge*.

The day was named at once, and the whitest of stones marks it, in now sorrowful memory. Dickens's promise was exceeded by our enjoyment; and his delight in the double recognition of himself and of Barnaby, by the Landlord of the nice old Inn, far exceeded any pride he would have taken in what the world thinks the highest sort of honour.

The exterior of the King's Head presents a very quaint appearance, and the solitude of its surroundings is an enhancement to its picturesqueness.

If, from the interior, we miss the kitchen with its cosy chimney corner which was so alluring to Gabriel Varden that he often went out of his way to avoid the Maypole on his way home from the Warren, rather than break his promise to his wife by looking in, we have the pleasure of taking our refreshment in the Chester Room—the “best apartment, spacious enough in all conscience, occupying the whole depth of the house, and having at either end a great bay window, as large as many modern rooms . . . although the best room in the Inn, it had the melancholy aspect of grandeur in decay and was much too vast for comfort,” and of reviewing there all the comings and goings at the Maypole described in the story.

Mr. Haredale's house, the Warren, figures largely in the story and was ultimately destroyed by the rioters—at which



THE MAYPOLE, CHIGWELL



THE ANGEL, BURY ST EDMUNDS

Photos by T. W. TAN II

time Nemesis overtook the elder Rudge who, in the first chapter, asked questions about the house while in disguise at the Maypole.

“What house is that which stands a mile or so from here?”

“Public-house!” said the landlord, with his usual deliberation.

“Public-house, father!” exclaimed Joe, “where’s the public-house within a mile or so of the Maypole? He means the great house—the Warren—naturally and of course. The old red brick house, sir, that stands in its own grounds—”

“Aye” said the stranger.

“And that fifteen or twenty years ago stood in a park five times as broad, which with other and richer property has bit by bit changed hands and dwindled away—more’s the pity!” pursued the young man.

There is no such house in the district to-day: nor have we been able to trace one in Dickens’s day to answer the description: but there was a Warren House in existence in 1770, about a mile away from the church, the residence of Sir Peter Warren, M.P. for Westminster, and Dickens may have heard of it. He usually called it the Warren, but in chapter thirty-four it is referred to as Warren House. It is thus described in chapter thirteen:

It was a dreary, silent building, with echoing courtyards, desolated turret-chambers, and whole suites of rooms shut up and mouldering to ruin.

The terrace-garden, dark with the shade of overhanging trees, had an air of melancholy that was quite oppressive. Great iron gates, disused for many years, and red with rust, drooping on their hinges and overgrown with long rank grass, seemed as though they tried to sink into the ground, and hide their fallen state among the friendly weeds. The fantastic monsters on the walls, green with age and damp, and covered here and there with moss, looked grim and desolate. There was a sombre aspect even on that part of the mansion which was inhabited and kept in good repair, that struck the beholder with a sense of sadness; of something forlorn and failing, whence cheerfulness was banished. It would have been difficult to imagine a bright fire blazing in the dull and darkened rooms, or to picture any gaiety of heart or revelry that the frowning walls shut in. It seemed a place where such

things had been, but could be no more—the very ghost of a house, haunting the old spot in its old outward form, and that was all.

From Chigwell, our way lies through Abridge and Ongar and we join the main Ipswich–Norwich road at Chelmsford, $29\frac{1}{2}$ miles from London. We do not hear that the presentiment of Dickens was realised, so we presume he reached Chelmsford without causing mortal harm to any person, whether an “only child” or otherwise. Chelmsford possesses a modern inn with an old name, the Black Boy, a famous coaching house in its time.

It was the elder Weller who gave Mr. Pickwick the clue to the presence of Jingle at Ipswich by informing him, that, working the Ipswich coach for a friend of his, he had met both Job Trotter and Jingle “at the Black Boy at Chelmsford—the very place they’d come to—and I took ‘em up, right through to Ipswich.”

Thereupon Mr. Pickwick started off in pursuit, but we do not hear that the coach made a stop at the Black Boy on the way.

From Chelmsford, the quickest way to Ipswich is through Colchester, $21\frac{3}{4}$ miles distant; this was the direct road Mr. Pickwick took in company with Mr. Magnus, but no mention is made of Colchester on the way. Nevertheless it has an interest to us, as it was at Colchester that Dickens gave a reading in the Theatre, on November 1st, 1861. He refers to the evident success of the reading in a letter written that day from the Great White Horse Hotel in Ipswich :

At mid-day we go on to Colchester, where I shall expect the young Morgans. I sent a telegram on yesterday, after receiving your note, to secure places for them. The answer returned by telegraph was: “No box-seats left but on the fourth row.” If they prefer to sit on the stage (for I read in the theatre, there being no other large public room), they shall. Meantime I have told John, who went forward this morning with the other men, to let the people at the inn know that if three travellers answering that description appear before my dinner-time, they are to dine with me.

However, avoiding Colchester in the present journey, we proceed on the main Norwich Road $25\frac{1}{2}$ miles to Sudbury.

Before leaving Essex for Suffolk we must not forget that the mouth of the River Thames divides that county from Kent, and there are often casual references in the novels to the Essex side of the river, notably in *David Copperfield*, and

Bleak House, in which latter book we are introduced to the fog on the Essex Marshes.

Magwitch in *Great Expectations* was “as near as possible” born in Essex, for he tells Pip:

I've no more notion where I was born, than you have—if so much. I first became aware of myself, down in Essex, a thieving turnips for my living. Summun had run away from me—a man—a tinker—and he'd took the fire with him, and left me very cold.

and, according to my friend, Colonel Gadd, it was on Canvey Island, at the Lobster Smack Inn, that the final scenes of the chase, and death of Magwitch, took place.

II

Suffolk was the county, other than Kent, that Dickens was fairly acquainted with, before he wrote *The Pickwick Papers*. In 1834 he wrote “A Passage in the Life of Mr. Watkins Tottle,” which appeared in the “Monthly Magazine” for January and February, 1834, and in this we read:

When I was in Suffolk . . . which is now some years ago, business led me to the town of Bury St. Edmunds. I had to stop at the principal places in my way, and, therefore, for the sake of convenience, I travelled in a gig. I left Sudbury one dark night . . .

In the July of that year (1834) Dickens, then 22 years of age, went to Sudbury, to report the Parliamentary bye-election.

In *The Pickwick Papers*, the Pickwickians arrive at Bury St. Edmunds from Eatanswill, and this, in our opinion, is the best reason that can be advanced for declaring Sudbury as the original of that famous town, whose origin has for long been a matter of discussion in the Dickens world. Dickens knew Sudbury only in relation to the Norwich road running through Bury St. Edmunds—not in relation with Ipswich, which has still some ardent supporters who declare it to be the one and only Eatanswill. To Ipswich, it will be remembered, the Pickwickians made a special journey from London, after returning from Bury St. Edmunds.

Eatanswill—like Muggleton—is one of the few towns in *The Pickwick Papers* that Dickens disguised. The name is sufficiently suggestive. Some say he derived it from the town of Eaton Socon—which in *Nicholas Nickleby* he humorously calls Eton Slocomb (see page 198). Be that as it may, Eatanswill was on the road to Norwich, and the London side of Bury St. Edmunds.

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This is how he referred to the town in chapter thirteen of *The Pickwick Papers*:

We will frankly acknowledge that, up to the period of our being first immersed in the voluminous papers of the Pickwick Club, we had never heard of Eatanswill; we will with equal candour admit, that we have in vain searched for proof of the actual existence of such a place at the present day. Knowing the deep reliance to be placed on every note and statement of Mr. Pickwick's, and not presuming to set up our recollection against the recorded declarations of that great man, we have consulted every authority, bearing upon the subject, to which we could possibly refer. We have traced every name in schedules A and B, without meeting with that of Eatanswill; we have minutely examined every corner of the Pocket County Maps issued for the benefit of society by our distinguished publishers, and the same result has attended our investigation. We are therefore led to believe that Mr. Pickwick, with that anxious desire to abstain from giving offence to any, and with those delicate feelings for which all who knew him well know he was so eminently remarkable, purposely substituted a fictitious designation, for the real name of the place in which his observations were made. We are confirmed in this belief by a little circumstance, apparently slight and trivial in itself, but when considered in this point of view, not undeserving of notice. In Mr. Pickwick's note-book, we can just trace an entry of the fact, that the places of himself and followers were booked by the Norwich coach; but this entry was afterwards lined through, as if for the purpose of concealing even the direction in which the borough is situated. We will not, therefore, hazard a guess upon the subject, but will at once proceed with this history; content with the materials which its characters have provided for us.

The Rose and Crown Hotel at Sudbury was, unfortunately, completely burnt down in 1922: it was generally considered to be the Town Arms of the story, the headquarters of the "Blue" candidate. It was here that the barmaid was reported to have been bribed to "hocus the brandy and water of fourteen unpolled electors as was stopping in the house."

The Peacock—the headquarters of the "buffs" where Mr. Tupman, Mr. Snodgrass, and Sam Weller stayed, and where the bagman told his famous story, is said to have its prototype in the Swan.

III

It was the chase after Jingle that took Mr. Pickwick and his friends from Eatanswill to Bury St. Edmunds. At Mrs. Leo Hunter's "Fête Champêtre" Jingle was introduced as Mr. Charles Fitz-Marshall, but quickly decamped on encountering "the indignant orbs of Mr. Pickwick."

On inquiring where Jingle lived, Mr. Pickwick was informed that he "is at present at the Angel, at Bury."

"At Bury?"

"At Bury St. Edmunds, not many miles from here. But dear me, Mr. Pickwick, you are not going to leave us; surely, Mr. Pickwick, you cannot think of going so soon."

"I will follow him," said Mr. Pickwick.

"Follow him! Where?" enquired Mr. Tupman.

"To the Angel at Bury" replied Mr. Pickwick, speaking very quickly. "How do we know whom he is deceiving there?"

Mr. Pickwick showed he already had knowledge of the town by his reference to the hotel there, and, indeed, was familiar with it, as, in connection with the Ladies' School, he mentioned later that he had observed it once before when he was in the town.

The distance between Sudbury and Bury St. Edmunds is 16½ miles, and:

Mr. Pickwick and Sam Weller perched on the outside of a stage coach, were every succeeding minute placing a less and less distance between themselves and the good old town of Bury St. Edmunds.

After the ride, graphically described and enlivened by Sam's reminiscences, they duly arrived in sight of the town.

"Beg your pardon sir" said Sam . . . "Is this Bury St. Edmunds?"

"It is" replied Mr. Pickwick.

The coach rattled through the well paved streets of a handsome little town of thriving and cleanly appearance, and stopped before a large inn situated in a wide open street, nearly facing the old Abbey.

"And this" said Mr. Pickwick looking up "is the Angel. We alight here."

The visitor to Bury St. Edmunds will not wonder why the town had a place of affection in the heart of Dickens. "The

bright little town of Bury St. Edmunds" he calls it—casually enough perhaps, but the right note is there—in one of his *Uncommercial Traveller* papers.

The Angel Hotel still stands opposite the Abbey Gateway, and at once calls to mind the adventures of Mr. Pickwick in search of Jingle. On their arrival Mr. Pickwick enjoining secrecy, engaged a private room and retired for the night. Sam turned scout: and after occupying the chair in the tap-room, he, too, retired to rest. Early on the ensuing morning, we are told :

Mr. Weller was dispelling all the feverish remains of the previous evening's conviviality, through the instrumentality of a halfpenny shower bath (having induced a young gentleman attached to the stable-department, by the offer of that coin, to pump over his head and face until he was perfectly restored), when he was attracted by the appearance of a young fellow in mulberry-coloured livery, who was sitting on a bench in the yard, reading what appeared to be a hymn-book, with an air of deep abstraction, but who occasionally stole a glance at the individual under the pump, as if he took some interest in his proceedings, nevertheless.

This was, of course, Jingle's accomplice, Job Trotter, who lured Mr. Pickwick with the tale that his master was about to elope with one of the pupils of a girls' school, described as "a large, old, red-brick house, just outside the town."

Pressed for further particulars, Job gives them in these words :

"Westgate House, sir. You turn a little to the right when you get to the end of the town; it stands by itself, some little distance off the high-road, with the name on a brass plate on the gate."

What is said to be the original of Westgate House still stands in Southgate Street, but it is more likely that Dickens had in mind Eastgate House in Rochester (afterwards the Miss Twinkleton's Academy of *Edwin Drood*) when penning the description. However, as we gaze at the wall by the side of the red-brick building, we conjure up the scene Dickens has pictured for us, and we can see the portly Pickwick in the very act of scaling the wall, assisted by Sam Weller.

As a result of this adventure, Mr. Pickwick was confined to his room in the Angel Hotel with an attack of rheumatism and was consoled by his friends on their arrival. It was whilst staying here that he received notice from Dodson and

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Fogg of Mrs. Bardell's action for breach of promise, which caused him to return to London. However, before he did so, his old friend Wardle arranged a shooting party on Sir Geoffrey Manning's grounds, which afforded Dickens an opportunity for writing one of the most humorous chapters in the book, in which Mr. Winkle distinguished himself with the gun, Mr. Pickwick with the cold punch, and gave Phiz, the artist, the opportunity of drawing that delightful picture of "Mr. Pickwick in the Pound."

In addition to its introduction into *The Pickwick Papers* Bury St. Edmunds is also mentioned in *David Copperfield*. Mr. Chillip, the family Doctor, retired to this district, as he informed David :

"I am established within a few miles of Bury St. Edmunds, sir," said Mr. Chillip. "Mrs. Chillip coming into a little property in that neighbourhood, under her father's will, I bought a practice down there, in which you will be glad to hear I am doing well."

Dickens twice visited Bury St. Edmunds with readings from his books: the first was on October 13th, 1859 and again on October 30th, 1861. On both occasions he stayed at the Angel Hotel.

After the first reading he wrote:

At Bury we had a demonstrativeness of the great working-towns and a much finer perception.

and on the occasion of the last reading he wrote to his sister-in-law (from Ipswich, November 1st, 1861) :

I cannot quite remember in the whirl of travelling and reading, whether or no I wrote you a line from Bury St. Edmunds. But I think (and hope) I did. We had a fine room there, and *Copperfield* made a great impression.

and to Wilkie Collins the same day:

Last night I read *Copperfield* at Bury St. Edmunds to a very fine audience. I don't think a word—not to say an idea—was lost!

IV

From Bury St. Edmunds to Ipswich is $25\frac{1}{2}$ miles. The Pickwickians however, returned to London before going to Ipswich, and made the journey of $69\frac{1}{2}$ miles from London to Ipswich on a later occasion.

Ipswich is on one of the main roads leading to Norwich, and it was this way that David Copperfield undoubtedly travelled to and from Yarmouth, as we shall see later on.

It was at the tavern off Cheapside—"second court on the right hand side—last house but vun on the same side the vay—" ("Mr. Weller's knowledge of London was extensive and peculiar") that old Tony Weller declared that the "chap, slim and tall, with long hair, and the gift o' the gab wery galloping . . . and a black haired chap in mulberry livery" were at Ipswich. And so Mr. Pickwick decided to follow him, adding "We may as well see Ipswich as any other place." Accordingly, from the Bull Inn, Whitechapel, in the coach driven by old Tony, Mr. Pickwick and Sam went to Ipswich, the tediousness of the journey being beguiled by the two Wellers with "conversation possessing the inestimable charm of blending amusement with instruction" and particularly dealing with oysters and pike keepers: and enlivened by Mr. Magnus and his anxiety concerning the safety of "the two bags, the leather hat box, and the brown paper parcel."

There is no account given of the road to Ipswich and we are plunged all at once into a description of the town of Ipswich and its noted hostelry :

In the main street of Ipswich, on the left-hand side of the way, a short distance after you have passed through the open space fronting the Town Hall, stands an inn known far and wide by the appellation of the Great White Horse, rendered the more conspicuous by a stone statue of some rampacious animal with flowing mane and tail, distantly resembling an insane cart-horse, which is elevated above the principal door. The Great White Horse is famous in the neighbourhood, in the same degree as a prize ox, or county paper-chronicled turnip, or unwieldy pig—for its enormous size. Never were such labyrinths of uncarpeted passages, such clusters of mouldy, ill-lighted rooms, such huge numbers of small dens for eating or sleeping in, beneath any one roof, as are collected together between the four walls of the Great White Horse at Ipswich.

It was at the door of this overgrown tavern that the London coach stopped, at the same hour every evening; and it was from this same London coach, that Mr. Pickwick, Sam Weller, and Mr. Peter Magnus dismounted, on the



THE GREAT WHITE HORSE, IPSWICH

Photo by Walter Deeter

particular evening to which this chapter of our history bears reference.

Upon Mr. Pickwick's enquiring "is there any gentleman of the name of Tupman here, waiter?"

A corpulent man, with a fortnight's napkin under his arm, and coeval stockings on his legs, slowly desisted from his occupation of staring down the street, on this question being put to him by Mr. Pickwick; and, after minutely inspecting that gentleman's appearance, from the crown of his hat to the lowest button of his gaiters, replied emphatically: "No."

Thereupon Mr. Pickwick and Mr. Magnus decided to dine alone, and asked the waiter to show them a private room.

On this request being preferred, the corpulent man condescended to order the boots to bring in the gentlemen's luggage and preceding them down a long dark passage, ushered them into a large badly-furnished apartment, with a dirty grate, in which a small fire was making a wretched attempt to be cheerful, but was fast sinking beneath the dispiriting influence of the place. After the lapse of an hour, a bit of a fish and a steak was served up to the travellers and when the dinner was cleared away, Mr. Pickwick and Mr. Peter Magnus drew their chairs up to the fire, and having ordered a bottle of the worst possible port wine, at the highest possible price, for the good of the house, drank brandy and water for their own.

It is said that Dickens had a grudge against the Inn; and it would certainly appear that he had!

Dickens was in Ipswich in 1835 to report the speeches at the Parliamentary Election of that year; and on the authority of the "Suffolk Chronicle"—for which it is said he was working, he stayed at the Great White Horse for two or three weeks, and it is surmised that the adventure, ascribed to Mr. Pickwick with "the middle-aged lady in the yellow curl papers" was an experience of young Dickens himself, and he was so incensed against the place that he wrote of it in the disparaging way to which we have referred.

But, it is pleasant to notice that the hotel is to-day proud of the fact that its name has been handed down to posterity in the pages of *Pickwick*, and nothing gives the manager so much pleasure as to direct you to the room which Mr.

Pickwick mistook for his own; and there you can see the identical (?) four-poster bedstead, out from the curtains of which Mr. Pickwick peeped, to behold the "Middle-aged lady, in yellow curl-papers, busily engaged in brushing what ladies call their 'back hair.'"

It is also interesting to note that on the occasions of his visits in 1859 and 1861 for the readings, Dickens stayed at the Great White Horse, as his letters testify.

It is typical of all Dickens's topography, that it has crept into the language and become a part of it, with its characters real living beings, and in a guide book to England that is not given to "writing up" any particular place, but which consists of a quantity of well-marshalled and interesting facts, we should hardly expect to find such references as these, under the headings of Ipswich and Bury respectively:

"Running E. from Cornhill is Tavern Street, with the Great White Horse Hotel (leaden sign) in which occurred Mr. Pickwick's remarkable adventure with the lady in yellow curl-papers. . . . In St. Clement's Lane, off Fore Street, Sam Weller saw Job Trotter coming out of the green garden gate.

Opposite (the Abbey) is the Angel Hotel where Sam Weller first encountered Job Trotter."

Yet these extracts are taken from "England," in Muirhead's "Blue" Guide Series, a noteworthy set now in course of publication.

The next morning we are introduced to the two Wellers taking their morning repast at the Great White Horse "in a small room in the vicinity of the stable-yard" when the elder one remarks on the "very good power o' suction" that his son possesses, and gives that amusing dissertation on the subject of Widders.

When the two parted, the elder to his London coach, Sam, we are told, bent his steps "towards St. Clements Church" and "endeavoured to dissipate his melancholy, by strolling among its ancient precincts."

Here in St. Clement's Lane was the house with "a green gate," at the far end of a "kind of courtyard of venerable appearance—which he discovered had no other outlet than the turning by which he had entered." Sam was fortunate enough to recognise Job Trotter despite his attempt to disguise himself by "contorting his face into the most fearful and astonishing grimaces that ever were beheld."

This, of course, was the house of Mr. Nupkins, the Mayor of Ipswich, before whom Mr. Pickwick was brought for a breach of the peace concerning the middle-aged lady with the yellow curl papers: and the account of the “trial” is quite as amusing as the other and more famous Trial to be engaged in later on.

This house provided Sam with a sweetheart: for Mary was the Mayor’s housemaid, and the famous valentine he penned her later, signed—in “poetry”

“Your love sick
Pickwick”

was addressed “Mary, House maid at Mr. Nupkins, Mayor’s, Ipswich, Suffolk.”

The main road between London and Yarmouth, through Ipswich, was often traversed by David Copperfield and particular mention of the fact is made in chapter fifty-five on the day of the great storm which resulted in the death of Ham and Steerforth :

When the day broke, it blew harder and harder. . . . We came to Ipswich—very late, having had to fight every inch of ground since we were ten miles out of London; and found a cluster of people in the market-place, who had risen from their beds in the night, fearful of falling chimneys. Some of these congregating about the inn-yard while we changed horses, told us of the great sheets of lead having been ripped off a high church-tower, and flung into a bye-street, which they then blocked up. Others had to tell of country people, coming in from neighbouring villages, who had seen great trees lying torn out of the earth, and whole ricks scattered about the roads and fields.

The Inn yard mentioned was doubtless that of the Great White Horse.

It was at Ipswich that Doctor Marigold courted his wife “from the footboard of the cart. She was a Suffolk young woman, and it was at Ipswich Market Place, right opposite the cornchandler’s shop.”

Dickens visited Ipswich three times on his reading tours. The first reading was on October 10th, 1859, in the Hall of what was then the Mechanics’ Institute, now known as the Ipswich Institute, when he wrote home referring to the fine perception of the audience and a “demonstrativeness equal to the great working towns.”

The reading on October 31st, 1861, was given in the Public Hall and his Farewell Reading was in the same hall on March 17th, 1869.

v

The Pickwickians never went farther east than Bury St. Edmunds and Ipswich: our tour now becomes solely associated with *David Copperfield*. There is a direct road from Ipswich to Norwich of 42 miles: and we go to Norwich first, before visiting Yarmouth to get an introduction to the Copperfield country in the same manner as Dickens himself obtained it.

In 1848 Dickens was searching for an objective for a winter jaunt with Mark Lemon, John Leech and Forster, on the same lines as the one they had taken earlier in the year in the neighbourhood of Stonehenge (see page 114). He first proposed Blackgang Chine in the Isle of Wight, but that fell through and then Dickens wrote to Forster: "It would be better to make an outburst to some old cathedral city we don't know, and what do you say to Norwich and Stanfield Hall?"

"Thither accordingly the three friends went," says Forster, "illness at the last disabling me; and of the result I heard (January 12th, 1849) that Stanfield Hall, the scene of a recent frightful tragedy, had nothing attractive unless the term might be applied to 'a murderous look that seemed to invite such a crime. We arrived,' continued Dickens, 'between the Hall and Potass farm, as the search was going on for the pistol in a manner so consummately stupid, that there was nothing on earth to prevent any of Rush's labourers from accepting five pounds from Rush Junior to find the weapon and give it to him.'"

The murder was that of the Recorder of Norwich, by Rush, who was executed at Norwich Castle.

We do not know why Dickens should have written Forster: "Norwich a disappointment, all save its place of execution, which we found fit for a gigantic scoundrel's exit. Perhaps it was overshadowed by what follows:

"But the success of the trip, for me, was to come. Yarmouth, sir, where we went afterwards, is the strangest place in the wide world: one hundred and forty-six miles of hill-less march between it and London. More when we meet. I shall certainly try my hand at it."

Thus it came about that a great part of *David Copperfield* is centred in the Yarmouth district.

On October 11th and 12th, 1859, Dickens made his first appearance in Norwich as a reader. "The Norwich people were a noble audience," he wrote, "we had a demonstration of the great working towns, and a much finer perception."

Dickens's second series of readings started with two nights at Norwich in 1861. His old friend and manager, Arthur Smith, had lately died: he had not yet engaged his later manager, George Dolby, and was evidently much out of sorts, for, after the first reading, on Monday, October 28th, he wrote from the Royal Hotel, Norwich (now no longer in existence).

I cannot say that we began well last night. We had not a good hall, and they were a very lumpish audience indeed. This did not tend to cheer the strangeness I felt in being without Arthur, and I was not at all myself. We have a large let for to-night, I think two hundred and fifty stalls, which is very large, and I hope that both they and I will go better. I could have done perfectly last night, if the audience had been bright, but they were an intent and staring audience. They laughed though very well, and the storm made them shake themselves again. But they were not magnetic, and the great big place was out of sorts somehow.

To Wilkie Collins he wrote in somewhat the same strain, and referred to St. Andrew's Hall, in which he read, a fine example of perpendicular architecture, and originally the nave of the church of the Dominicans.

The first night at Norwich was a dismal beginning—altogether unwonted and strange. We had not a good let and (the place of reading being a great cold stone paved Gothic Hall) the audience appeared to be afraid of me and of each other. I was out of sorts. Everything seemed forlorn and strange to me. Poor dear Arthur gone, and the very wind in the arches (—them!) seemed to howl about it. . . . Next night was *Nickleby* and *The Trial*. I had had a good walk in the bright air, and time to reason myself up a bit. There was a brilliant audience. . . . The people were really quite ridiculous to see when Squeers read the boys' letters.

To Miss Hogarth he wrote more cheerfully the next day from Bury:

I have just now received your welcome letter, and I hasten to report (having very little time) that we had a splendid hall last night, and that I think *Nickleby* tops all the readings. Somehow it seems to have got in it, by accident, exactly the qualities best suited to the purpose, and it went last night not only with roars, but with a general hilarity and pleasure that I have never seen surpassed.

The last visit to the city was on March 29th, 1867.

Norwich is referred to only once in *David Copperfield*, and that is when Miss Mowcher is giving an account of the movements of Steerforth and Em'ly:

My country rounds brought me to Norwich, Mr. Copperfield, the night before last. When I happened to find out there, about their secret way of coming and going, without you—which was strange—led to my suspecting something wrong. I got into the coach from London last night, as it came through Norwich, and was here this morning.

Norwich was in Dickens's mind when writing his last book, for we find it recorded that Bazzard's father was a Norfolk farmer, and used to send Mr. Grewgious at Christmas time a turkey from the neighbourhood of Norwich.

VI

David Copperfield was “born at Blunderstone in Suffolk, or ‘thereby’ as they say in Scotland.” How Dickens came to locate the birthplace of his “favourite child,” in this part of England, is shown in a letter written to his French friend, M. de Cerjat, on December 29th, 1849.

What a strange coincidence that is about Blunderstone House! Of all the odd things I have ever heard (and their name is Legion), I think it is the oddest. I went down into that part of the country on January 7th of last year, when I was meditating the story, and chose Blunderstone for the sound of its name. I had previously observed much of what you say about the poor girls. In all you suggest with so much feeling about their return to virtue being cruelly cut off, I concur with a sore heart. I have been turning it over in my mind for some time, and hope, in the history of Little Em'ly (who *must* fall—there is no hope for her), to put it before the thoughts of people in a new and pathetic way, and perhaps to do some good. You will be

glad to hear, I know, that "Copperfield" is a great success. I think it is better liked than any of my other books.

What the coincidence was about Blunderstone House, we are unable to say. According to this letter, it was on January 7th, 1848, that Dickens was in the district. According to Forster—quoted on page 280—the trip to Norwich on which the acquaintance of Yarmouth was first made, was in January, 1849, a very short time before commencing to write the story. Dickens may possibly have made an error in his letter to M. de Cerjat, in stating "last year" instead of "last." We wonder too, if he intentionally made the name of the village more full of meaning by altering it from Blundeston to Blunderstone?

To Mrs. Watson, to whom, with her husband, the book was dedicated, Dickens wrote in 1853:

I saw the name Blunderstone on a direction post between it and Yarmouth and took it from the said direction post for the book.

Kitton says—but we cannot find his authority for the statement—that Dickens "stayed for a time in 1848 at Somerleyton Hall, near Lowestoft, as the guest of Sir Morton Peto, the well known civil engineer and railway contractor, under whose guidance he first made acquaintance with that portion of Suffolk." This may be the occasion to which Dickens referred. Blundeston is about two miles this side of Somerleyton, on the cross road between Lowestoft and Fritton.

In the first chapter of *David Copperfield*, Miss Betsey Trotwood after she had "looked in at the window, pressing the end of her nose against the glass to that extent that . . . it became perfectly flat and white in a moment" suddenly says:

"In the name of Heaven, why Rookery?"

"Do you mean the house, ma'am?" asked my mother.

"Why Rookery?" said Miss Betsey. "Cookery would have been more to the purpose, if you had had any practical ideas of life, either of you."

"The name was Mr. Copperfield's choice," returned my mother. "When he bought the house, he liked to think that there were rooks about it. . . ."

"Where are the birds?" asked Miss Betsey.

"The —?" My mother had been thinking of something else.

"The rooks—what has become of them?" asked Miss Betsey.

"There have not been any since we have lived here," said my mother. "We thought—Mr. Copperfield thought—it was quite a large rookery; but the nests were very old ones, and the birds have deserted them a long while."

"David Copperfield all over!" cried Miss Betsey. "David Copperfield from head to foot! Calls a house a rookery when there's not a rook near it, and takes the birds on trust, because he sees the nests!"

There is no doubt that the Rectory at Blundeston is the original of the "Rookery," although little David's account of the "long passage" leading to the kitchen might have been taken from Blundeston Hall, now called The Lodge, which it is said Dickens visited at this time.

On the ground-floor is Peggotty's kitchen, opening into a back yard; with a pigeon-house on a pole, in the centre, without any pigeons in it; a great dog-kennel in a corner, without any dog; and a quantity of fowls that look terribly tall to me, walking about, in a menacing and ferocious manner.

Here is a long passage—what an enormous perspective I make of it!—leading from Peggotty's kitchen to the front door. A dark store-room opens out of it, and that is a place to be run past at night; for I don't know what may be among those tubs and jars and old tea chests, when there is nobody in there with a dimly-burning light, letting a mouldy air come out at the door, in which there is the smell of soap, pickles, pepper, candles, and coffee, all at one whiff. Then there are the two parlors; the parlor in which we sit of an evening, my mother and I and Peggotty. . . .

And now I see the outside of our house, with the latticed bed-room windows standing open to let in the sweet-smelling air, and the ragged old rooks'-nests still dangling in the elm-trees at the bottom of the front garden. Now I am in the garden at the back, beyond the yard where the empty pigeon-house and dog-kennel are—a very preserve of butterflies, as I remember it, with a high fence, and a gate and padlock.

In a later chapter we are given some of those personal



BLUNDESTONE RECTORY



BLUNDESTONE CHURCH

Photo by Walter Dado

touches which go to show how much of Dickens's self was put into the story, among which is a picture of

A summer evening, the boys at play in the church-yard, and I sitting on my bed, reading as if for life. Every barn in the neighbourhood, every stone in the church, and every foot of the churchyard, had some association of its own, in my mind, connected with these books, and stood for some locality made famous in them. I have seen Tom Pipes go climbing up the church-steeple; I have watched Strap, with the knapsack on his back, stopping to rest himself upon the wicket-gate; and I *know* that Commodore Trunnion held that club with Mr. Pickle, in the parlor of our little village alehouse.

Thus do we to-day pursue our topographical enquiries only in the way that Dickens himself did!

In chapter two there is a reference to the Church:

There is nothing half so green that I know anywhere, as the grass of that churchyard; nothing half so shady as its trees; nothing half so quiet as its tomb-stones. The sheep are feeding there, when I kneel up, early in the morning, in my little bed in a closet within my mother's room, to look out at it; and I see the red light shining on the sun-dial, and think within myself, "Is the sun-dial glad, I wonder, that it can tell the time again?"

This is a proof that the Rookery must have been the Rectory as the churchyard is not visible from the Hall. The visitor will notice the sundial over the porch, and will recall David's recollection of the high-backed pew they occupied in the church, near a window out of which their house could be seen.

The Plough Inn at Blundeston is "our little village ale house" and from here Mr. Barkis's cart used to start for Yarmouth. It is said that when Dickens visited the place the name of the carrier was Barker!

In 1853 Dickens, in writing to Mrs. Watson, said:

Lowestoft I know, by walking over there from Yarmouth when I went down on an exploring expedition previous to *Copperfield*. It is a fine place.

Lowestoft has an interesting connection with *David Copperfield*—the Royal Hotel there being no less than the

birthplace of that immortal expression “Brooks of Sheffield” (see page 237).

It was before the second and disastrous marriage of David’s mother, that her admirer, Mr. Murdstone, said to her that he was going to Lowestoft to see some friends who were there with a yacht, and merrily proposed “to take young David on the saddle before him if he would like the ride.”

And so David accompanied him, and “went to a hotel by the sea, where two gentlemen were smoking cigars.”

This was undoubtedly the Royal Hotel, and here his mother was referred to as “bewitching” and “pretty little widow,” which occasioned Mr. Murdstone to say:

“Take care, if you please, somebody’s sharp!”

“Who is?” asked the gentleman laughing.

I looked up quickly, being anxious to know.

“Only Brooks of Sheffield” said Mr. Murdstone.

and here later they drank in sherry “Confusion to Brooks of Sheffield,” with much laughter.

VII

Just prior to Mrs. Copperfield’s second marriage, Peggotty took David for a fortnight’s holiday to her brother’s house at Yarmouth. They went by Barkis’s cart by “so many deviations up and down lanes and were such a long time delivering a bedstead at a public house.” It is suggested that the Village Maid at Lound was the public-house in question.

Here too, when later on, Barkis again drove Peggotty and David into Yarmouth, they no doubt stopped:

He was so polite as to stop at a public-house, expressly on our account, and entertain us with broiled mutton and beer. . . . But as we drew nearer to the end of our journey, he had more to do and less time for gallantry; and when we got on Yarmouth pavement, we were all too much shaken and jolted, I apprehend, to have any leisure for anything else.

Later in the same chapter, we read that Peggotty’s Wedding Breakfast was taken in “a little inn in a bye road”—perhaps it was the same inn as the one previously referred to, as Barkis was not a man to vary his places of call.

David Copperfield often traversed the road between Blundeston and Yarmouth, and on the occasion of the

burial of Mr. Barkis at Blunderstone, he tells us how he parted from the two Peggottys and "instead of going back, waited a little distance on the road to Lowestoft. Then I turned, and walked back towards Yarmouth," stopping to dine at a "decent ale house some mile or two from the ferry." This, says Mr. Matz in "Dickensian Inns and Taverns" was probably the Feathers at Gorleston.

To resume little David's account of his first visit to Yarmouth:

I was quite tired and very glad when we saw Yarmouth. It looked rather spongy and soppy, I thought, as I carried my eye over the great dull waste that lay across the river; and I could not help wondering, if the world were really as round as my geography-book said, how any part of it came to be so flat. But I reflected that Yarmouth might be situated at one of the poles; which would account for it.

As we drew a little nearer, and saw the whole adjacent prospect lying a straight low line under the sky, I hinted to Peggotty that a mound or so might have improved it; and also that if the land had been a little more separated from the sea, and the town and the tide had not been quite so much mixed up, like toast and water, it would have been nicer. But Peggotty said, with greater emphasis than usual, that we must take things as we found them, and that, for her part, she was proud to call herself a Yarmouth Bloater.

When we got into the street (which was strange enough to me), and smelt the fish, and pitch, and oakum, and tar, and saw the sailors walking about, and the carts jingling up and down over the stones, I felt that I had done so busy a place an injustice; and said as much to Peggotty, who heard my expressions of delight with great complacency, and told me it was well known (I suppose to those who had the good fortune to be born Bloaters) that Yarmouth was, upon the whole, the finest place in the universe.

The Buck Inn is suggested as the likely public house where Peggotty met her "'Am—growed out of knowledge" and they started off for Dan'l Peggotty's house.

We turned down lanes bestrewn with bits of chips and little hillocks of sand, and went past gas-works, rope-walks, boat-builders' yards, ship-wrights' yards, ship-breakers'

yards, riggers' lofts, smiths' forges, and a great litter of such places, until we came out upon the dull waste I had already seen at a distance; when Ham said:

“Yon’s our house, Mas’r Davy!”

I looked in all directions, as far as I could stare over the wilderness, and away at the sea, and away at the river, but no house could *I* make out. There was a black barge, or some other kind of superannuated boat, not far off, high and dry on the ground, with an iron funnel sticking out of it for a chimney and smoking very cosily; but nothing else in the way of a habitation that was visible to *me*.

“That’s not it?” said I. “That ship-looking thing?”

“That’s it, Mas’r Davy,” returned Ham.

If it had been Aladdin’s palace, roc’s egg and all, I suppose I could not have been more charmed with the romantic idea of living in it. There was a delightful door cut in the side, and it was roofed in, and there were little windows in it; but the wonderful charm of it was, that it was a real boat which had no doubt been upon the water hundreds of times, and which had never been intended to be lived in, on dry land. That was the captivation of it to me. If it had ever been meant to be lived in, I might have thought it small, or inconvenient, or lonely; but never having been designed for any such use, it became a perfect abode.

The original of this “wonderful house” (there have been many imitations since) was James Sharman’s Black Hut which stood near the Nelson Monument. In those days a sandy waste stretched from Kimberley Terrace to the Nelson Monument, such as Dickens describes.

The inn at Yarmouth from which David travelled to London, in disgrace, for Salem House School, where “the coach was in the yard, shining very much all over, but without any horses to it as yet: and it looked in that state as if nothing was more unlikely than its ever going to London” and where “the friendly waiter” assisted David in eating an enormous dinner, is The Duke’s Head, which Mr. B. W. Matz points out was the principal coaching inn in the town. The same authority locates the inn where David stayed with Steerforth when he first introduced him to the Peggotty household, as the Star Hotel.

We went down by the Mail . . . and Steerforth said as we drove through the dark streets to the inn . . . it was a good, queer, out of the way kind of hole. . . . We

went to bed on our arrival (I observed a pair of dirty shoes and gaiters in connection with my old friend the *Dolphin* as we passed that door).

David had made the acquaintance of this inn much earlier, on the occasion of his first holiday from school, when he saw his mother for the last time.

When we arrived before day at the inn where the mail stopped, which was not the inn where my friend the waiter lived, I was shown up to a nice little bedroom, with *Dolphin* painted on the door. Very cold I was, I know, notwithstanding the hot tea they had given me before a large fire down stairs; and very glad I was to turn into the *Dolphin*'s bed, pull the *Dolphin*'s blankets round my head, and go to sleep.

Another Yarmouth inn connected with the book is the *Willing Mind*, Peggotty's "house of call" where Stee forth used to ingratiate himself by standing treat to the fishermen. There is no inn of such a name in the town, but the name savours somewhat of the *Village Maid* at Lound, to which we have already referred.

One other Yarmouth landmark, and that is the shop of Omer, the undertaker, where David heard the men making his mother's coffin:

We walked away to a shop in a narrow street, on which was written Omer, Draper, Tailor, Haberdasher, Funeral Furnisher, etc. It was a close and stifling little shop; full of all sorts of clothing, made and unmade, including one window full of beaver-hats and bonnets. We went into a little back-parlour behind the shop, where we found three young women at work on a quantity of black materials. . . .

The three young women, who appeared to be very industrious and comfortable, raised their heads to look at me, and then went on with their work. Stitch, stitch, stitch. At the same time there came from a workshop across a little yard outside the window a regular sound of hammering that kept a kind of tune: Rat-tat-tat. Rat-tat-tat, Rat-tat-tat, without any variation.

This is identified with the quaint shop of a carpenter and coffin-maker, in the quaint old street called Middlegate Street: the number is 74.

Our next point of interest in this eastern part of England, is Peterborough, one hundred miles from Yarmouth by way of Norwich and King's Lynn.

Among the early readings that Dickens gave for the benefit of local working men's institutions, was one at Peterborough on December 18th, 1855. This was in aid of the Peterborough Mechanics' Institute, and the meeting was held in the Wentworth Rooms, attached to the Wentworth Hotel, on the site of which the Grand Hotel now stands. The Mechanics' Institute ceased to exist in the 'eighties.

The following interesting letter was written to his friend, Mrs. Watson, of Rockingham Castle—to which we refer later in this chapter—and dated September 16th, 1855:

Now I wish to tell you that I have been appointed to read at Peterboro' on Tuesday the eighteenth of December. I have told the Dean that I cannot accept his hospitality, that I am going with Mr. Wills to the inn, therefore I shall be absolutely at your disposal, and shall be more than disappointed if you don't stay with us. As the time approaches will you let me know your arrangements, and whether Mr. Wills can bespeak any rooms for you in arranging for me.

In the December Dickens was in Paris, and according to a letter which he wrote to Wilkie Collins on December 12th, he crossed over to Engand specially for the Peterborough meeting.

We cannot find any record of the hotel at which Dickens stayed, but it was probably the Wentworth.

The Watsons undoubtedly joined him on that occasion, because on December 23rd, after he had read at Sheffield (to which place he had travelled after leaving Peterborough) he wrote to Mrs. Watson, "Enormous effect at Sheffield. But really not a better audience perceptively than at Peterborough, for that could hardly be."

There is a touch of Mugby Junction (see page 150) about Dickens's experience at the refreshment room on Peterborough Station, to judge from a letter written to Miss Mary Boyle in 1856. He was returning after the reading and presentation at Sheffield (page 238) and

At two or three o'clock in the morning I stopped at Peterborough again and thought of you all. The Lady in

the refreshment room was very hard upon me, harder even than those fair enslavers usually are. She gave me a cup of tea as if I were a hyena, and she my cruel keeper with a strong dislike to me. I mingled my tears with it, and had a petrified bun of enormous antiquity in miserable meekness.

Dickens paid only one other visit to Peterborough. This was when he read in the Corn Exchange on Wednesday, October 19th, 1859.

On that day he addressed the following letter from Peterborough to Frank Stone:

This is a place which—except the cathedral, with the loveliest front I ever saw—is like the back door to some other place. It is, I should hope, the deadest and most utterly inert little town in the British Dominions. The magnates have taken places, and the bookseller is of opinion that “such is the determination to do honour to Mr. Dickens, that the doors must be opened half an hour before the appointed time” You will picture to yourself Arthur’s quiet indignation at this, and the manner in which he remarked to me at dinner “that he turned away twice Peterborough last night.”

A very pretty room—though a Corn Exchange—and a room we should have been glad of at Cambridge, as it is large, bright and cheerful, and wonderfully well lighted.

The difficulty in getting to Bradford from here to-morrow at any time convenient to us, turned out to be so great, that we are all going in for Leeds (only three quarters of an hour from Bradford) to-night after the reading, at a quarter past eleven. We are due in Leeds a quarter before three.

The note about turning away “twice Peterborough last night” referred to the previous day’s reading at Manchester.

IX

It was during the holiday in Switzerland in 1846 that Dickens first met the Hon. Richard and Mrs. Watson who became his life-long friends. At their beautiful home at Rockingham Castle he spent some most enjoyable times and in addition to dedicating his “favourite child” *David Copperfield* to the Watsons, he has left us as a legacy a descriptive picture of the mansion in *Bleak House* where it figures as “Chesney Wold in Lincolnshire.”

Rockingham Castle is in Northamptonshire and is quite as conveniently reached by rail from Peterborough as by road. The latter way takes you through Oundle and along the Market Harborough road where $2\frac{1}{2}$ miles beyond Corby, the Uppingham road leads past the castle grounds.

During his first visit in 1849, Dickens wrote to Forster as follows:

Rockingham Castle: Friday, thirtieth of November, 1849. Picture to yourself, my dear F., a large old castle, approached by an ancient keep, portcullis, &c., &c., filled with company, waited on by six-and-twenty servants; . . . and you will have a faint idea of the mansion in which I am at present staying. I should have written to you yesterday, but for having had a very busy day. Among the guests is a Miss B. (Mary Boyle). . . . This lady is renowned as an amateur actress, so last night we got up in the great hall some scenes from *The School for Scandal*; the scene with the lunatic on the wall, from the *Nicholas Nickleby* . . . some conjuring; and then finished off with country dances; of which we had two admirably good ones, quite new to me, though really old. Getting the words, and making the preparations, occupied (as you may believe) the whole day; and it was three o'clock before I got to bed. It was an excellent entertainment, and we were all uncommonly merry. . . . We leave here this afternoon. . . . Of all the country-houses and estates I have yet seen in England, I think this is by far the best. Everything undertaken eventuates in a most magnificent hospitality; . . . I regard it as a fortunate circumstance for the neighbouring community that this patrimony should have fallen to my spirited and enlightened host. Every one has profited by it, and the labouring people in especial are thoroughly well cared-for and looked after. To see all the household, headed by an enormously fat housekeeper, occupying the back benches last night, laughing and applauding without any restraint; and to see a blushing sleek-headed footman produce, for the watch-trick, a silver watch of the most portentous dimensions, amidst the rapturous delight of his brethren and sisterhood; was a very pleasant spectacle.

Of this first visit he wrote to his French friend de Cerjat on December 29th, 1849:

We had a most delightful time at Watsons' (for both of them we have preserved and strengthened a real affection)



ROCKINGHAM CASTLE



THE SONDES ARMS, ROCKINGHAM

Photo by Walter Dexter

Pilgrimage to Copperfield Country 293

and were the gayest of the gay. There was a Miss Boyle staying in the house, who is an excellent amateur actress and she and I got up some scenes from "The School for Scandal" and from *Nickleby*, with immense success. We played in the old hall, with the audience filled up and running over with servants. The entertainments concluded with feats of legerdemain (for the performance of which I have a pretty good apparatus, collected at divers times and in divers places), and we then fell to country dances of a most frantic description, and danced all night.

Unfortunately Mr. Watson died in 1852, but Dickens's friendship with Mrs. Watson continued, and he continued a regular visitor to Rockingham.

Forster adds that Dickens "during the too brief time his excellent friend was spared to him, often repeated his visits to Rockingham, always a surpassing enjoyment; and in the winter of 1850 he accomplished there, with help of the country carpenter 'a very elegant little theatre' of which he constituted himself manager. . . . It will be one more added to the many examples I have given of his untiring energy both in work and play, if I mention the fact that this theatre was opened at Rockingham for their first representation on Wednesday the 15th of January; that after the performance there was a country dance which lasted far into the morning; and that on the next evening, after a railway journey of more than 120 miles, he dined in London with the Prime Minister, Lord John Russell."

The pieces played were "Used Up," "The Day After the Wedding" and "Animal Magnetism," for which latter he wrote a special "tag" for the occasion, the last lines of which were:

Stay yet again. Among us all I feel
One subtle, all-pervading influence steal,
Stirring one wish within our heart and head;
Bright be the path our host and hostess tread!
Blest be their children, happy be their race,
Long may they live, this ancient hall to grace;
Long bear of English virtues noble fruit—
Green-hearted Rockingham! Strike deep thy root.

It is probable that the following description from *A Christmas Tree*, published in 1850, was prompted by his visits to Rockingham:

On, by low-lying misty grounds, through fens and fogs, up long hills, winding dark as caverns between thick plantations, almost shutting out the sparkling stars; so, out on broad heights, until we stop at last, with sudden silence, at an avenue. The gate-bell has a deep half-awful sound in the frosty air; the gate swings open on its hinges; and, as we drive up to a great house, the glancing lights grow larger in the windows and the opposing rows of trees seem to fall solemnly back on either side, to give us place. . . . And so, the lights growing larger, and the trees falling back before us, and closing up again behind us, as if to forbid retreat, we come to the house. . . . It is an old house, full of great chimneys where wood is burnt on ancient dogs upon the hearth, and grim Portraits (some of them with grim Legends too), lower distrustfully from the oaken panels of the walls. . . . We make a generous supper with our host and hostess and their guests—it being Christmas-time, and the old house full of company—and then we go to bed. Our room is a very old room. It is hung with tapestry. . . . There are great black beams in the ceiling, and there is a great black bedstead, supported at the foot by two great black figures, who seem to have come off a couple of tombs in the Old Baronial Church in the Park, for our particular accommodation.

All authorities agree that Lady Dedlock's "place in Lincolnshire" in *Bleak House* was founded on Rockingham Castle in the neighbouring county, and we have Dickens's confession to Mrs. Watson in a letter dated August 27th, 1853, that:

In some of the descriptions of Chesney Wold, I have taken many bits, chiefly about trees and shadows, from observations made at Rockingham. I wonder whether you have ever thought so!

Our first introduction in the book to this delightful spot is during the wet wintry weather—and it was November time when Dickens first saw it.

The vases on the stone terrace in the foreground catch the rain all day; and the heavy drops fall, drip, drip, drip, drip, upon the broad flagged pavement, called, from old time, the Ghost's Walk, all night. . . . The rain is ever falling, drip, drip, drip, by day and night, upon the broad flagged terrace-pavement, the Ghost's Walk. The weather is so very bad down in Lincolnshire, that the liveliest imagination can scarcely apprehend its ever being fine again. . . .

The discontented goose, who stoops to pass under the old gateway, twenty feet high, may gabble out, if we only knew it, a waddling preference for weather when the gateway casts its shadow on the ground. . . . The horses in the stables—the long stables in a barren, red-brick courtyard, where there is a great bell in a turret, and a clock with a large face, which the pigeons who life near it, and who love to perch upon its shoulders, seem to be always consulting.

Although Rockingham Castle is on an eminence, the River Welland in the valley below often overflows, and thus was obtained the suggestion of the Lincolnshire Fens which Dickens transposed into the description.

The old gateway to which Dickens refers in the above extract is the remains of the former Norman castle, and passing through it we find ourselves facing the north front of the mansion which contains the drawing-room, so often figuring in the story. The Hall, in which the plays were given, is a magnificent specimen of Elizabethan architecture and contains some of the family portraits ("no end to the Dedlocks" as Mr. Guppy thought when he went to see them).

It is not difficult to associate with the Yew Walk the Ghost's Walk of *Bleak House*, although the stone paving is lacking.—

A fuller description of the house was given later by Esther Summerson when she and her guardian visited Mr. Boythorn who was neighbour of Sir Leicester Dedlock, between whom a deadly feud existed regarding a right of way which necessitated Mr. Boythorn going two miles out of his way from the village to reach his house.

The park, as then, is open to the public, upon application to the gardener. It will be remembered that much of dramatic importance occurs in the grounds of Chesney Wold; Esther's description of the house and grounds is as follows:

It was a picturesque old house, in a fine park richly wooded. . . . O, the solemn woods over which the light and shadow travelled swiftly, as if Heavenly wings were sweeping on benignant errands through the summer air; the smooth green slopes, the glittering water, the garden where the flowers were so symmetrically arranged in clusters of the richest colours, how beautiful they looked! The house with gable and chimney, and tower, and turret, and dark doorway, and broad terrace-walk, twining among the balustrades of which, and lying heaped upon the vases,

there was one great flush of roses, seemed scarcely real in its light solidity, and in the serene and peaceful hush that rested on all around it. . . . On everything, house, garden, terrace, green slopes, water, old oaks, fern, moss, woods again, and far away across the openings in the prospect, to the distance lying wide before us with a purple bloom upon it, there seemed to be such undisturbed repose. . . .

I passed before the terrace garden with its fragrant odours, and its broad walks, and its well-kept beds and smooth turf; and I saw how beautiful and grave it was, and how the old stone balustrades and parapets, and wide flights of shallow steps, were seamed by time and weather; and how the trained moss and ivy grew about them, and around the old stone pedestal of the sundial; and I heard the fountain falling. Then the way went by long lines of dark windows, diversified by turreted towers, and porches, of eccentric shapes, where old stone lions and grotesque monsters bristled outside dens of shadow, and snarled at the evening gloom over the escutcheons they held in their grip. Thence the path wound underneath a gateway, and through a court-yard where the principal entrance was (I hurried quickly on), and by the stables where none but deep voices seemed to be, whether in the murmuring of the wind through the strong mass of ivy holding to a high red wall, or in the low complaining of the weathercock, or in the barking of the dogs, or in the slow striking of a clock. So, encountering presently a sweet smell of limes, whose rustling I could hear, I turned with the turning of the path, to the south front; and there, above me, were the balustrades of the Ghost's Walk, and one lighted window that might be my mother's.

When Esther made her first acquaintance with "the most friendly of villages" she came down by coach with Mr. Jarndyce and Harold Skimpole and it was undoubtedly at Market Harborough, nine miles distant, that they alighted, to meet Mr. Boythorn "waiting with an open carriage to take us to his house which was a few miles off."

Late in the afternoon we came to the market-town where we were to alight from the coach—a dull little town, with a church-spire, and a market-place, and a market-cross, and one intensely sunny street, and a pond with an old horse cooling his legs in it, and a very few men sleepily

ROCKINGHAM CASTLE.

On WEDNESDAY Evening, January 16th, 1851.

Will be presented

USED UP!

Sir Charles Coldstream

Sir Adams Leech

The Honourable Tom Savill

Wurzel

(a Farmer)

John Ironbrace

(a Blacksmith)

Mr. Frankl

(a Lawyer)

James

(a Tiger)

Mary

Lady Clutterbuck

Mr. CHARLES DICKENS

Mr. WILLIAM STOPFORD

Mr. GOWRAN VERNON

Captain CAVENDISH BOYLE

Mr. STAFFORD

The Hon. Captain QUIN

Master BENGAL

Miss MARY BOYLE

Mrs. CHARLES DICKENS

to be followed by the Intermission of

A DAY AFTER THE WEDDING

Colonel Freeove

Mr. CHARLES DICKENS

Lord Rivers

Mr. GOWRAN VERNON

James

Captain CAVENDISH BOYLE

Lady Elizabeth Freeove

Miss MARY BOYLE

Mrs. Davies

The Hon. Mr. SPENCER LYTTLETON

The Performances will conclude with Mrs. Inchbold's Farce

ANIMAL MAGNETISM.

The Doctor

Mr. CHARLES DICKENS

La Fleur

Captain CAVENDISH BOYLE

The Marquis de Lancy

Mr. STAFFORD

Jeffrey

Mr. WILLIAM STOPFORD

Constance

Miss HOGARTH

Laetitia

Miss MARY BOYLE

Costumes, Messrs. WATKINS of Tickhams Street, Haymarket.

Properties, Mr. WILSON of the Strand.

ACTING AND STAGE MANAGERS

Mr. CHARLES DICKENS

The Theatre will be opened at a Quarter past Eight, and the Performances will commence at Eight o'Clock.

God Save the Queen!

FACSIMILE OF A PLAY BILL OF AMATEUR THEATRICALS AT
ROCKINGHAM CASTLE

lying and standing about in narrow little bits of shade. After the rustling of the leaves and the waving of the corn all along the road, it looked as still, as hot, as motionless a little town as England could produce.

At length they came to "the little village and passed a small inn with the sign of the Dedlock Arms swinging over the road in front." This has its prototype in the Sondes Arms, Sondes being the family name of the Watson family who still inhabit the castle.

The "shady, ancient, solemn little church in the park" is reached by a pathway from the village street—the disputed pathway that always roused the ire of Mr. Boythorn.

We arrived at his house on a Saturday. On the Sunday morning we all set forth to walk to the little church in the park. Entering the park, almost immediately by the disputed ground, we pursued a pleasant footpath winding among the verdant turf and the beautiful trees, until it brought us to the church-porch.

In an earlier chapter we are told:

On Sundays, the little church in the park is mouldy; the oaken pulpit breaks out into a cold sweat; and there is a general smell and taste as of the ancient Dedlocks in their graves.

Mr. Boythorn "lived in a pretty house, formerly the Parsonage-house." It is described as:

A real old house, with settles in the chimney of the brick-floored kitchen, and great beams across the ceilings. On one side of it was the terrible piece of ground in dispute, where Mr. Boythorn maintained a sentry in a smock-frock, day and night, whose duty was supposed to be, in cases of aggression, immediately to ring a large bell hung up there for the purpose, to unchain a great bull-dog established in a kennel as his ally, and generally to deal destruction on the enemy. Not content with these precautions, Mr. Boythorn had himself composed and posted there, on painted boards to which his name was attached in large letters, the following solemn warnings: "Beware of the Bull-dog. He is most ferocious. Lawrence Boythorn." "The blunderbuss is loaded with slugs. Lawrence Boythorn." "Man-traps and spring-guns are set here at all times of the day and night. Lawrence Boythorn."

Cambridge, like its sister city Oxford, is not often referred to by Dickens.

In *Great Expectations* we are told that Mr. Pocket had "distinguished himself at Cambridge" and from *A Tale of Two Cities* we learn that Charles Darnay read with undergraduates at Cambridge as "a sort of tolerated smuggler who drove a contraband trade in European languages." There are equally minor references in "George Silverman's Explanation" and *Mrs. Lirriper*.

It was, however, not overlooked in his reading tours. Dickens's first reading was on October 17th, 1859, in the Guildhall, when he read the *Carol* and the *Pickwick Trial*. The following night he read *The Story of Little Dombey* and *Mrs. Gamp*, and the next day wrote the following letter to Frank Stone from Peterborough:

We had a splendid rush last night. They were a far finer audience than the previous night. I think the finest I have ever read to. They took every word of the Dombey in quite an amazing manner, and after the child's death, paused a little, then set up a shout that it did one good to hear. Mrs. Gamp then set in with a roar, which lasted till I had done. I think everybody for the time forgot everything but the matter in hand. It was as fine an instance of thorough absorbtion in a fiction, as any of us are likely to see ever again.

On March 27th, 1867, he again read at Cambridge, and on this occasion wrote to Forster :

The reception at Cambridge was something to be proud of in such a place. The colleges mustered in full force, from the biggest guns to the smallest: and went beyond even Manchester in the roars of welcome and rounds of cheers. The place was crammed, and all through the reading everything was taken with the utmost heartiness of enjoyment.

His farewell reading was two years later, on March 18th, 1869, also at the Guildhall.

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All places named have an association either with Dickens or his books.

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